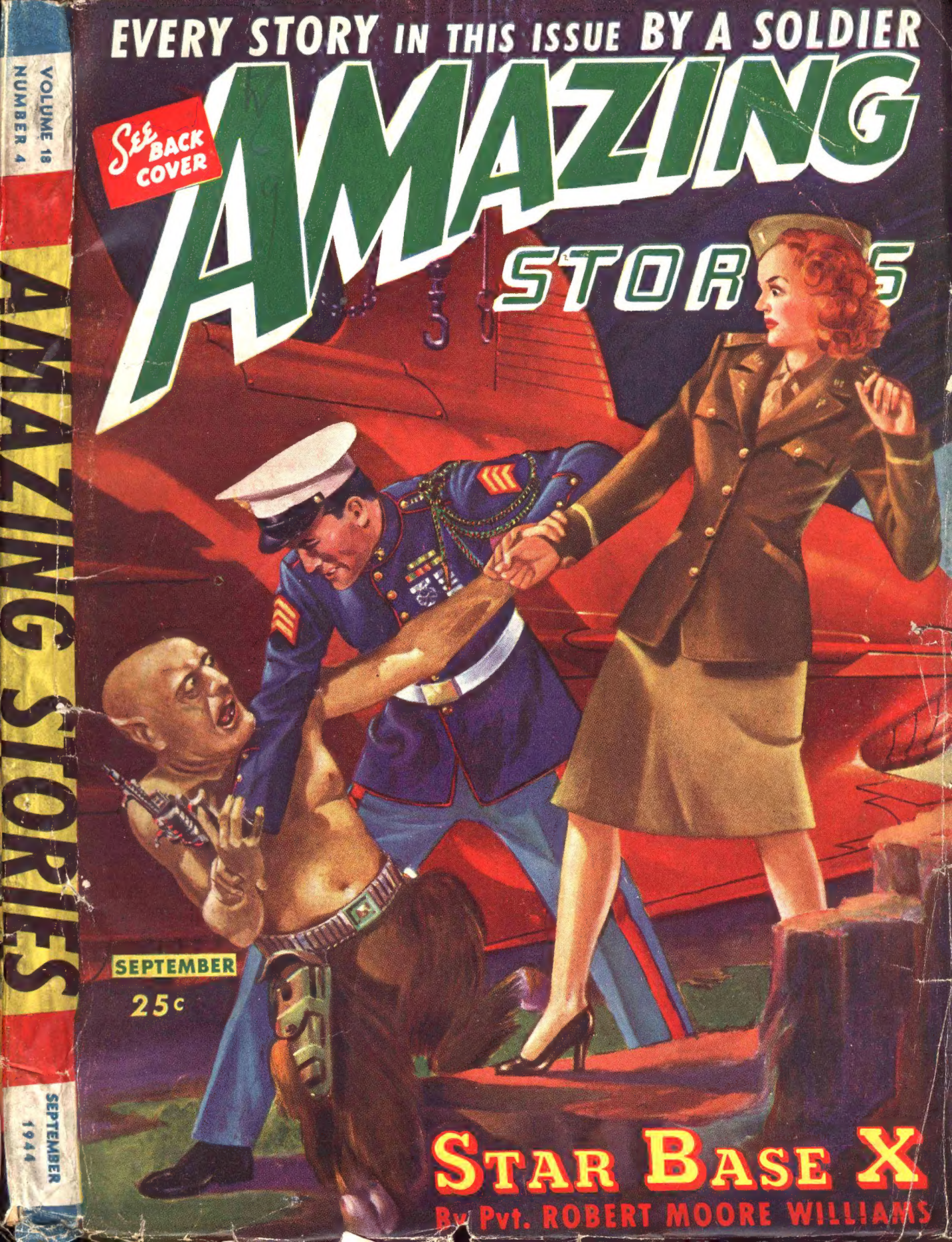
VOLUME 18
NUMBER 4

EVERY STORY IN THIS ISSUE BY A SOLDIER

See BACK COVER

AMAZING STORIES



SEPTEMBER
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STAR BASE X

By Pvt. ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

AMAZING STORIES

SEPTEMBER
1944

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AMAZING STORIES

VOLUME 18
NUMBER 4

STORIES

STAR BASE X (Short Novel) . . . . . By Pvt. Robert Moore Williams . . 8
Illustrated by Robert Fuqua
A telepathic message came to John Dawson's mind—and it led him to an incredible alien base . . .

THE THINKING CAP (Novelet) . . . . . By Sgt. William P. McGivern . . . 38
Illustrated by Magarian
A thinking cap would be a great help to a man. Yes indeed! That is, if it thought straight!

PRIVATE PRUNE SPEAKING (Novelet) . . . . . By Cpl. David Wright O'Brien . . . 62
Illustrated by Cpl. Herbert McClure
Private Prune certainly didn't intend to say the things he did; they just popped out of his mouth!

PROFESSOR THORNDYKE'S MISTAKE (Short) . . . . . By Sgt. P. F. Costello 82
Illustrated by Robert Fuqua
Mack wouldn't have minded if cats had nine lives—especially this particular cat! But it didn't—

DOLLS OF DEATH (Novelet) . . . . . By Pvt. E. K. Jarvis 96
Illustrated by Magarian
What was Herkles' reason for making these dolls? Certainly not to be used as harmless toys!

WEAPON FOR A WAC (Short) . . . . By Sgt. Morris J. Steele 128
Illustrated by Lt. Russell Milburn
If Uncle Whitfield thought a fairy tale about a sword would make Mary join the Wac, he was all wet!

DOUBLE-CROSS ON MARS (Novelet) . . . . . By Sgt. Gerald Vance 134
Illustrated by Pfc. Julian S. Krupa
Terry Lester had to get involved with a bunch of wrong guys to find out who the right guys were.

WARBURTON'S INVENTION (Novelet) . . . . . By Pvt. Russell Storm 154
Illustrated by J. Allen St. John
A pound of metal should always weigh a pound, shouldn't it? Even when it's part of a thinking robot.

OVERLORD OF VENUS (Short) . . . . . By Lt. William Lawrence Hamling 174
Illustrated by A. K. Bilder and Pfc. Julian S. Krupa
Usually when a man walks into the sea and under it, he drowns. Was that what was happening on Venus?

MATCHES AND KINGS (Short) . . . . By Cpl. John York Cabot 186
Illustrated by Pfc. Julian S. Krupa
It was all a trumped up publicity slogan; lighting three on a match just sold matches, not Death.

I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN (Short) . . . . . By Cpl. Duncan Farnsworth 194
Illustrated by Robert Fuqua
No matter what waited over Berlin, he'd promised to come back to her in the springtime, and he did.

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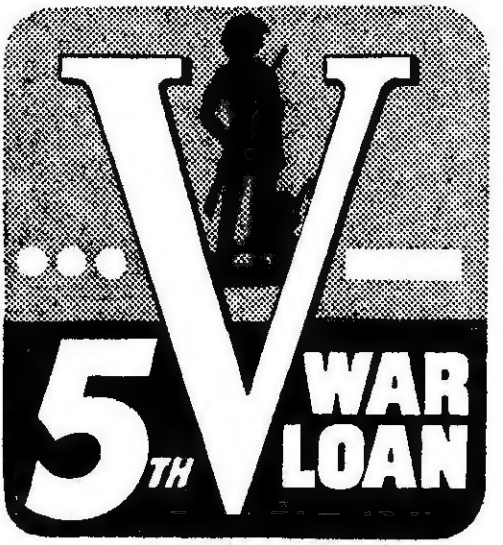
TABLE OF CONTENTS

SEPTEMBER
1944



FEATURES

Front cover painting by Pfc. Julian S. Krupa illustrating a scene from "Star Base X." Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul depicting a scene from a planet in the constellation Orion.

THE OBSERVATORY	By The Editor	6
CARTOON	By Cpl. Vic Herman	6
VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS	By Lt. Lynn Standish	37
UNDER COVER	By Pvt. James Nelson	37
THE ELECTRON GUN	By Cpl. King Keillor	94
SODA POP HAS GONE TO WAR	By Pfc. Asa Brown	126
LANGUAGE OF ELECTRONICS	By Cpl. King Keillor	127
MATH SCIENCE IN ELECTRONICS	By Cpl. King Keillor	153
SCIENCE IN WAR	By S/Sgt. A. Morris	154
MEET THE AUTHORS	By Lt. William Lawrence Hamling	185
SCIENTIFIC MYSTERIES	By L. Taylor Hansen	198
DISCUSSIONS	By Servicemen	202
READER'S PRIZE CORNER	Prize Winner Pfc. John Haliburton	206
STORIES OF THE STARS	By Sgt. Morris J. Steele	208

AMAZING STORIES SEPTEMBER 1944

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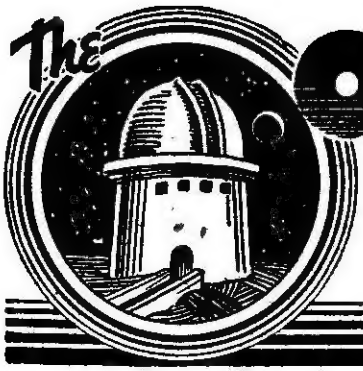
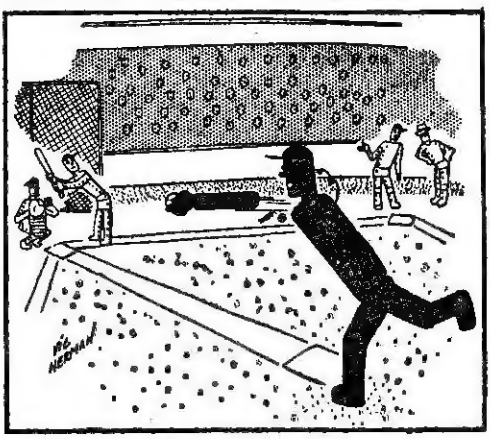
Volume 18
Number 4



The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

YOUR editors believe this issue to be one of the most unusual we have ever presented; and we also believe it to be one of the finest. First, as you were promised in our last issue, this is the special "service-written" AMAZING STORIES. Every story, every article (with one exception), every filler, every letter in Discussions, a good proportion of the illustrations, and the front and back cover is by someone who is serving his country in the armed forces in one way or another! Second, the stories are on a par with any stories of the past, or better!

USUALLY, when a special "stunt" like this is attempted, it is hard to make every item sing; but when we told our "soldier" writers about it, they evidently made a firm resolve to write their best stories. It was tough enough, we thought, to ask them to devote free time to a story, considering the strain many of them were under. We expected some of the stories to show that strain. Well, they have, but not in the way we expected! Readers, these fighting men are *real* men! When the chips are down, they're holding a full house! When you've finished reading this issue you'll understand the kind of spirit that will carry the beachheads of Europe and Japan no matter what the opposition! We take our hats off to the American fighting writer. He's got what it takes!



"Oh, oh. There goes the ball game! Ironhead's thrown his arm out again!".

DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN, now a corporal in the Army Air Force, will undoubtedly be on his way overseas as you read this, along with some of the biggest poison ever cooked up for the enemy—and that's all he can tell us. His position is tail or waist gunner—and believe us, he can hit 'em. Sgt. William P. McGivern, when last heard from, was staring out over the briny blue from beside his AA battery on a transport. He'll be in the big push—and we predict the Germans ain't gonna like him! Pvt. Robert Moore Williams is in the air force, but has just come from 99 days in camp hospital with pneumonia. There's a guy with guts! His manuscript came in *just the same!* Sgt. P. F. Costello sent us his story from Alabama, written between sessions with his gun crew. We don't know where he is now. Pvt. E. K. Jarvis is also in the air force, now stationed in St. Louis. Sgt. Morris J. Steele went into Africa a year ago, and is still there. He writes: "If you don't hear from me for a while, you'll know I'm in it thick!" Sgt. Gerald Vance called on us the other day with news that he's "on his way." Lt. William Lawrence Hamling is at present in Chicago, his future undecided, because of a land mine blast which put him in the hospital with a serious head injury. Our first writer casualty. Cpl. John York Cabot, Army Air Force, is training for the big-time down in (censored). He's a gunner. Pvt. Russell Storm, somewhere in the south in Air Force Maintenance. Cpl. Duncan Farnsworth last heard from over Berlin. He's safe in England and awaiting more missions. Pfc. Julian S. Krupa, now inactive Marine because of a physical disability. Our second casualty. At present in Chicago, passing time working for AMAZING. Paul is in Navy work in Florida. Cpl. Herbert McClure at Aberdeen illustrating for the army. Lt. Russell Milburn *not* illustrating, and not heard from. He is almost certainly overseas. Lt. Lynn Standish in New Guinea. Pvt. James Nelson stationed in Alaska. Pfc. Asa Brown whereabouts unknown. Cpl. King Keillor in Texas in Marine Air Corps. S/Sgt. A. Morris in Alabama. Cpl. Louis Sampliner in South America. Pvt. Vic Herman cartooning for the army in Aberdeen. *Rap*

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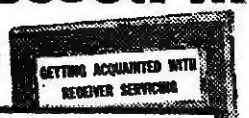

PARTIAL LIST OF SUBJECTS

How a superheterodyne circuit works
How to remove tubes, tube shields
Three reasons why Radio tubes fail
Electrodynamic loudspeaker
Output transformer repair
Gang tuning condenser
I.F. transformers—What they do, repair hints
How to locate defective soldered joints
Inside story of carbon resistors
Paper, electrolytic, mica, trimmer condensers
Antenna, oscillator coil facts
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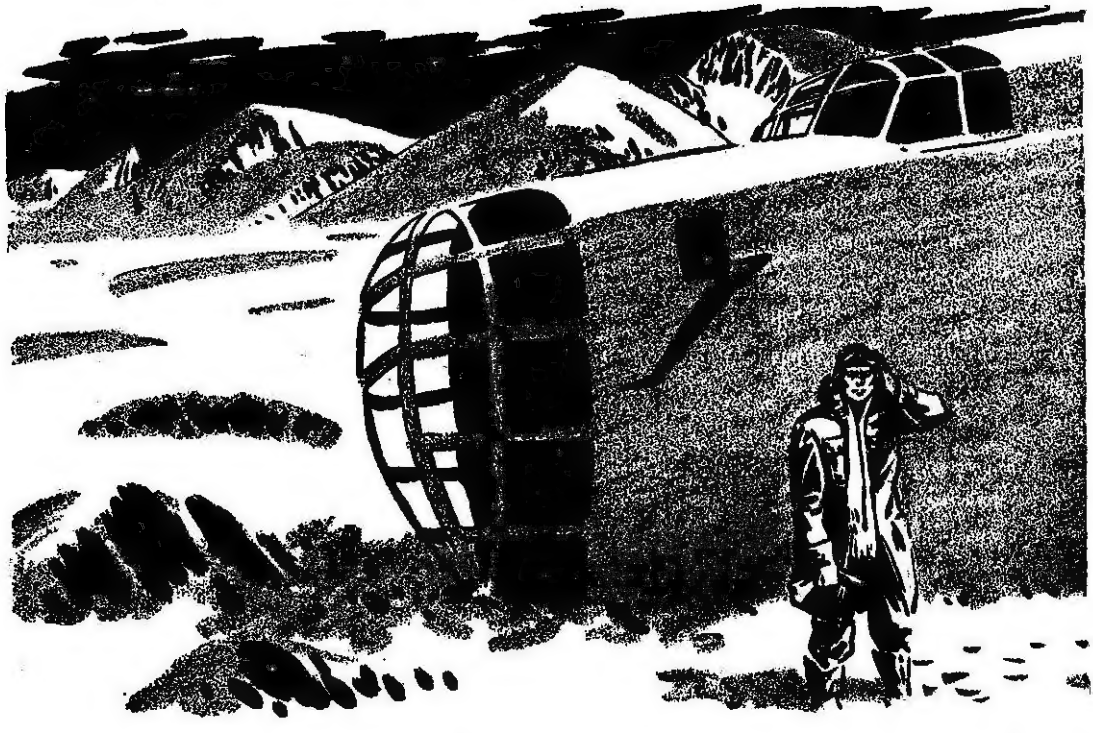
STAR BASE X



By Pvt. ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT FUQUA

There was something more than just military about this base in the Antarctic—something from beyond Earth

THE thought that came into his mind was very clear.

"I must watch this man carefully. He has intuitive intelligence and is dangerous."

John Dawson raised his eyes from the book he was pretending to read. His lean brown face remained completely placid, completely under control. Only the narrowing of the pupils of his eyes, the sudden puckering of the tiny lines forming a V on his forehead, showed how startled he really was.

Telepathy! he thought. The knowledge that he had received a telepathic impulse was startling but not too much so. After all, telepathy, the contact of mind to mind, the operation of some kind of mental radio, was not impossible. It was something that could hap-

"Look at those tracks! Have you ever seen anything like them before? At least on this Earth?"

pen, and if little every-day experiences were to be trusted, it happened more often than was commonly thought. It was not the fact of telepathy that startled him so much as the content of the thought that had come into his mind.

"I must watch this man carefully. He has intuitive intelligence and is dangerous."

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, Dawson knew that *he* was the man who must be watched carefully, *he* was the man who was dangerous. The unknown person whose thoughts he had received was thinking about *him!* Which could mean only one thing: his identity, in spite of the effort that had been made to keep it secret, had been discovered. One of the passengers on this giant Liberator C-87 transport plane knew who Dawson was.

"Damn!" he growled, deep in his throat.

Lieutenant Art Jecke, sitting next to him and until that moment engaged in musingly watching the landscape slip by far below them, turned startled eyes in his direction. With all the familiarity that years of friendship brings, he spoke bluntly.

"Hey, John. What makes? Why the deep and mournful note of profanity?"

"Nothing," Dawson said. "I suddenly remembered something I had forgotten."

The lieutenant regarded him thoughtfully. Jecke had a round, inquiring face with a tiny mole on his left cheek that made him look something like Ronald Colman.

"Um," he said. The look on his face plainly indicated he was going to say more.

Dawson swore silently. He knew what was going to happen next. The hardest part of his job were the questions asked by well-meaning friends, who, seeing he was not in khaki, wanted to know why. Jecke, spruce in the uniform of an army communications officer, was no exception.

"Um, John. I don't mean to pry, but exactly what the hell are you doing on this plane?"

"I'm going to Base X," Dawson said. Because Jecke was his friend, he could not tell him to go to hell or to mind his own business.

"Hell, I know *that!*" Jecke answered. "If you're on this ship, you're going to Base X because the plane is going there. But why in hell would a lawyer be going up into that frozen wilderness of Labrador where Base X is located? That's the question, John. With the exception of the personnel at the base, the only living creatures near there are Eskimos—and damned few of them—and a scattering of hungry husky dogs. Now I never heard of Eskimos calling in an expensive lawyer like you, which leaves only the dogs. Are you going north to represent the dogs?"

DAWSON grinned wryly. "It's a long story," he said. "You know that Base X is supplied entirely by plane?"

"Naturally."

"And that the planes are owned by the army but they are operated under contract with the army by commercial air lines. In other words the army owns the ships, supplies equipment and so forth, and the commercial air lines supply personnel and the know-how. The result is that the army gets what it wants — transportation — and the air lines get a job to do. Is that clear?"

"Sure. But where do you come in?"

"I represent the air lines, which brings me to my reason for being on this plane. I'm going to Base X to help clear up a legal snarl in which the army alleges that its equipment was

misused by the operators. The crack-up of a plane was the case in dispute. My clients maintain that the plane was not misused, that it was sent out—they admit by necessity—in bad weather and that they are not responsible. The whole situation raises several complex legal questions, including—"

"Me out," Jecke said, laughing. "I didn't realize what I was letting myself in for."

"You wanted to know what I was doing here," Dawson complained.

"And I've been told. And if I don't stop you, I'll be listening to a lecture on the development of the law from Blackstone down to the present. Skip it, John. I've heard enough."

"All right," Dawson said, retiring into hurt silence. Secretly he was well pleased. Jecke had swallowed his story, hook, line and sinker. Jecke was his friend but Dawson had deliberately lied to him, inventing a fanciful story that had not a word of truth in it. In Dawson's business, it was essential that you don't talk, even to your best friend.

Dawson was a lawyer. That much was the truth. When the war started, he had promptly offered his services to the FBI, and had been as promptly accepted. Dawson was an agent of the FBI, one of Mr. Hoover's saboteur hunters. He was on this plane because headquarters had a tip that a German secret agent might also be on the big transport.

The location of Base X was a military secret. The powers-that-be preferred to keep it a secret.

Dawson's orders were to identify the Huns' agent and take him into custody.

Excluding Dawson and the crew, there were seven passengers on the big Liberator cargo carrier. One of those passengers was an enemy spy, if the tip headquarters had received was correct.

The FBI agent no longer doubted that the tip was correct. The startling telepathic impulse that had come into his mind confirmed it. It also confirmed that his own identity was known.

Or were the words that had come into his mind merely an illusion? Had they come from his own subconscious mind instead of from some outside source?

He frowned. The words had *been* very clear. They had been a strong whisper in his mind.

"I must watch this man carefully. He has intuitive intelligence and is dangerous."

The phrase *intuitive intelligence* seemed to be significant. Dawson had been a brilliant lawyer with an excellent record of cases won. In his heart he knew that many of his most spectacular courtroom victories had been the result of hunches, ideas that suddenly popped into his mind about some move to make, ideas that seemed to come from nowhere. Just as this idea had come!

He was no mystic, no clairvoyant, no searcher after hidden things. But in his heart he suspected he possessed to some slight degree a special power of reading other person's minds. Or maybe his own mind was receptive to the thoughts radiated by some other person. He had had too many hunches just when he needed them to doubt that they were usually true. They came, he did not know how, he did not know from where. They might be called telepathy, clairvoyance, or intuitive intelligence, the ability to grasp truth directly without going through a laborious reasoning process.

His hunch now was that his identity was known, that he was being watched, closely, by someone on the plane.

He settled himself in his seat, pretended to read. The printed page was a blank before his eyes. In reality he was studying the passengers, sizing them up,

searching for the one he wanted to locate.

Night was coming. The heavily-loaded plane droned northward into the gathering darkness.

CHAPTER II

Passenger Missing!

"REALLY a remarkable place." This was Carson, an engineer, sitting across the tiny aisle, talking. Dawson knew the man's name. Before boarding the plane, he had carefully checked the credentials of the passengers. The papers of all of them were in order.

But that was to be expected. The Hun had earned a reputation for thoroughness and such a spy could be expected to turn up with forged credentials on which the last i had been dotted and the last t crossed.

"I've heard Base X is something unusual," Carson's seat mate answered. This was Captain Duwe, an army doctor. He had a thin, cadaverous face. Behind thick-lensed spectacles, alert eyes seemed to keep close watch on everything that went on around him.

Was this doctor a spy? It seemed impossible. But a spy on this plane was also impossible. Dawson, pretending to read, listened to the conversation between the two men.

"Base X is really a small city," Carson was saying. "In one sense, it is the most unusual city on earth."

"What do you mean?"

"For one thing, it is supplied entirely by air. Every pound of freight that goes there, goes in by plane. But Base X is unique in another way. As I said, it's a small city. Now, a city supplies the needs of the surrounding countryside. A city comes into existence to meet a human need. The odd thing about Base X is this—the need it meets does not exist anywhere near it. The need it meets is in England, completely across the Atlantic. The need that called Base X into existence is thousands of miles away. If, for instance, a man from Mars should visit Base X, with no knowledge of conditions on earth, and should try to understand from a study of the base itself why it was ever built, he would have an impossible task on his hands. He could only conclude that human beings were damned fools, for they had built a city right out in the middle of the wilderness. Of course, we know there is a real need for that city."

This engineer had something on the ball. He was enthusiastic about his subject. He was in civilian clothes but, for that matter, so was Dawson. A great many of the people who worked at Base X were civilians.

From the seats ahead came a burst of laughter. Two army nurses were playing gin rummy with two men and were having a whale of a good time doing it. The two men were Marine Corps' electricians, Dawson remembered, going north to handle some intricate electrical installations at the base, as the nurses were going to the small hospital there. Tice, that was the blond electrician; Graydon was the one with the black hair and the brown skin. The nurses were Beatrice Lehn and Jean Parker.

An Army communications officer, an army doctor, an engineer, two nurses and two electricians. Lieutenant Jecke, Captain Duwe, Carson, Beatrice Lehn, Jean Parker, Tice, and Graydon.

Was one of these seven persons a German spy?

"Excuse it please, John," Lieutenant Jecke rose from his seat. Dawson turned his long legs out into the aisle and Jecke squeezed past him, went to the lavatory. As the lieutenant squeezed past him, Dawson was fret-

fully aware of the mole on his right cheek. For some reason the mole irritated him. Why in the devil didn't Art have it removed, he wondered.

ACROSS the aisle Carson and Captain Duwe were continuing their conversation. Carson was still talking about Base X. The nurses and the two electricians were still playing gin rummy.

"Damn!" Dawson muttered. "If one of these people is a German spy, I'll eat my blasted hat."

Judging by the way they looked and acted, by the way they conducted themselves, by the way they spoke the English language, it was impossible for one of them to be a spy. They were all obviously Americans.

Dawson had a hunch that one of them was not what he seemed to be. One thing was certain: headquarters knew that somebody was trying to get to Base X. Someone had tried to bribe a civilian going north to give up his place on the plane and his identification papers. The civilian had reported the matter and the FBI had gone into action.

Somebody who had no business there was trying to get to Base X. That much was sure. Of course there was the possibility that the spy had not managed to get on this particular plane. On the other hand, there was a chance that he had. More than anything else, Dawson was trusting his hunch that something was wrong. As the minutes passed, the feeling grew stronger.

It was an indefinable feeling. It could not be tied down to any definite fact.

The plane struck an air pocket, lurched off to one side, but was pulled back as the pilot applied compensating controls and brought the big sky-monster back to even flight. The nurses squealed as the ship lurched, then laughed at their own fright. Carson stopped talking.

"Bad bump," Dawson said, glancing across the aisle.

"I've had worse ones," the engineer answered, laughing. Duwe looked a little pale.

The feeling that something was wrong grew stronger.

"What the hell *can* be wrong?" Dawson thought.

Then another thought struck him. Lieutenant Jecke was spending a long time in the lavatory. Was Art sick, he wondered. Dawson got to his feet, went to the washroom. If Jecke was sick, maybe he could help.

Jecke wasn't sick. He wasn't in the washroom at all.

"Why, damn it—I saw him go in here. If he had come out, I would have seen him—"

Dawson was suddenly cold. He backed out of the tiny lavatory, looked down the aisle of the plane to reassure himself that Jecke had not returned to his seat.

Jecke was not in his seat.

Am I going nuts, Dawson thought. Jecke has to be in the washroom or in his seat. There isn't any other place for him to be unless he hid behind one of the packing boxes.

The plane was a cargo carrier. Every inch of space was crammed full of equipment going north to Base X.

Maybe Jecke had crawled into one of the packing boxes!

Dawson dismissed the idea as soon as it occurred to him. What was far more likely was that Jecke had gone from the washroom forward to the control cabin and was talking to the pilots. Dawson went to look.

THE bronzed face of big Jim Fletcher, the pilot, looked around at him as he pushed open the door.

"Passengers not allowed up here," Fletcher said.

The co-pilot glanced around, then turned his attention back to the instrument panel.

Jecke was not in the control room.

"Did a man come in here a few minutes ago?"

"Nope," the pilot said. "If he had, we'd have tossed him out. Nobody allowed up here, which includes you. Sorry and all that sort of thing, but regulations are regulations."

Dawson apologized and backed out.

Jecke was somewhere else. He wasn't in the nose and he wasn't in the passenger compartment. Only the carefully-stowed freight was left as a hiding place.

Was Jecke hiding? If so, why? Was he playing a joke of some kind?

Grimly Dawson began to search. He drew amazed stares from the passengers but that didn't matter. When he had finished he went again to the control room.

"You again?" the big pilot said. Fletcher looked worried, but the co-pilot lounged at ease in his cushioned seat. The ship was not being piloted by the automatic device provided for that purpose. "What's on your mind this time? Are you still looking for a man?"

The pilot wasn't being intentionally rude. He just didn't have any time to talk to passengers.

"Is there any way off this ship?" Dawson asked.

The question got the pilot's complete attention. Fletcher stared at him in astonishment. "Any way off the ship? What the hell are you talking about? There's a mile of air below us!"

"I'm talking about this. You've lost a passenger."

"We've lost a—" Fletcher's face underwent a sudden change. "Take it easy, buddy," he said, his eyes probing into Dawson's grim face. "There's nothing to get alarmed about. If a man fell out, he'll just open his parachute and float down to the ground."

"I may be insane, but if I am, it's new with me," Dawson said. "I'm not giving you any cock-and-bull story. There was a Lieutenant Art Jecke on this plane. If he's here now, I can't find him. That's why I asked you if there was any way off the ship."

For an instant Fletcher looked speculatively at Dawson. "You take her," he said to the co-pilot. "Hold her on the course we're flying now and maybe we can go around that weather front up ahead. I'll see what this guy's got on his mind."

Fletcher slipped out of the pilot's seat, faced Dawson.

"Now, buddy, who are you?"

Dawson produced his badge. The sight of the little golden bauble made a marked change in the pilot's attitude. When he looked up there was respect in his eyes.

"One of Mr. Hoover's boys, eh? Well, I never heard of one of them going nuts. What's this story about a man being missing?"

Dawson told him what had happened. Together they searched the plane. "It's impossible to open the doors and get out while the ship is in full flight," the mystified pilot explained. "If he was once here, he's got to be here."

"Where is he?"

THAT was the question. Where was Jecke? The pilot questioned the passengers, to make certain that Jecke had been on the ship.

"I saw him," Carson said. "He got up and went to the can. Has something happened to him?"

"I distinctly recollect the man," Captain Duwe said. "There was a small mole on his right cheek."

"He must have been here," Fletcher

admitted. "The question is, where is he now? I know this big crate better than I know the palm of my hand and if there is a place on it where a man could hide, I don't know about it."

It was a worried pilot who at last went forward to the control room. It was an equally worried FBI agent who slumped down in his seat.

Jecke had literally vanished from the plane.

The other passengers were aware that something was wrong. Dawson could see the worried looks on their faces. Dawson sat in frowning silence. There was something that had happened, if he could only remember it, that promised a clue. It was a little thing. What the hell was it? Like an erratic gadfly that buzzes and buzzes but will not light, it whispered through his mind. Suddenly he remembered what it was. He turned to Captain Duwe across the aisle.

"Did you say that Jecke had a mole on his right cheek?"

"Why, yes, as I recall it, it was on his right cheek. What difference does that make?"

"That's the way I recall it too," Dawson said. "When he got up to go to the washroom, the mole was on his right cheek. And that was wrong. Absolutely wrong. I've known him for years, and the mole has always been on his *left* cheek."

He remembered it quite clearly. When Jecke had been sitting beside him the mole had been on his left cheek. But when the lieutenant had gotten up and squeezed past him, the mole had been on the right cheek.

"What's the significance of that?" the puzzled doctor demanded.

"Significance?" Dawson answered. "Significance? Why—"

What was the signficance? How could a tiny mole change from one cheek to the other? And if it had happened, what could it possibly mean?

A sudden, inexplicable shiver passed through Dawson's body. He felt as if a door leading to outer space had been opened and for an instant the cold wind from the void had blown over him.

CHAPTER III

Mystery on the Plane

WHAT had happened to Jecke? He could not have gotten out of the plane unless he unlocked and opened the big door, no easy job against the air blast from the propellors, certainly no job that a man could do without be-observed. If he couldn't have gotten off the plane, he ought to be on it. He wasn't. That was that.

The droning of the motors changed in tone. The ship banked sharply, then steadied off. Fletcher stuck his head out of the control room.

"Weather front up ahead. We got to go around it."

The door banged shut after he had made his announcement.

The plane was changing its course to avoid bad weather. A front might bring snow and wind; it might even bring the dreaded icing, more weight than the de-icing devices could shake off. Almost immediately after making the turn the air seemed to get rougher. Icy blasts were racing by outside, jolting the big carrier. Far to the north, the weird glow of the northern lights was visible against the sky. Somewhere up there above the Pole, streamers of brilliant flame reached long fingers into the void.

The passengers looked uneasily at each other. Conversation had ceased. The rummy game had been broken off. Each person in the plane was trying not to think.

Dawson abruptly left his seat and went to the washroom. This was the last place he was sure Jecke had been. There might be a clue here. Dawson searched the tiny cubicle with painstaking care. No one really knows what the word *search* means until he has seen a G-man at work.

He found nothing.

The passengers looked hopefully at him as he came out.

"But what really happened to that man?" Jean Parker asked.

"Yeah, where did he go?" Graydon added.

"Did he jump off the plane?" Tice questioned.

Dawson sat down with the group. He should have questioned them sooner but he had been too bewildered to do the logical thing. His questions brought no answers.

"We knew from the way you and the pilot were searching that you were looking for someone and we guessed it was the man we had seen go into the washroom," the nurse said.

"Did any of you see him come out of that washroom?"

They shook their heads.

"We were playing rummy and not paying any attention. He might have come out and we just didn't notice him," Tice suggested.

"I remember something," Beatrice Lehn said. She was a little girl with brown hair and alert brown eyes.

"What is it?" Dawson questioned eagerly.

"I don't know whether it means anything or not but I *think*—I'm not sure about this, remember—I *think* the door of the washroom swung open soon after he went in. But no one came out and I thought the catch had come loose and the door had just swung open by itself."

"The door opened but no one came out," Dawson mused. Had an invisible man walked out of that door? He shook his head, angry at himself for thinking such a thing. Men just didn't make themselves invisible.

"Gee, this worries me," Jean Parker whispered. "That poor man! I wonder what happened to him."

"I wonder if the same thing could happen to one of us!" Graydon spoke up.

A shiver of apprehension passed through the group.

"Why don't we do something?" Tice angrily demanded. "We can't just sit here and let a man disappear and not do anything about it."

"If you have any suggestions, I'd like to hear them," Dawson said grimly. "We've searched the plane. He's not here. If you can think of anything else to be done, between you and me, I'll be darned glad to do it."

The electrician swallowed and shut up. He realized there was nothing that could be done.

A MAN had vanished. There was nothing that could be done about it. That was all. He had just vanished. If his vanishing raised prickles on the scalps of his fellow-passengers, that was too bad.

Dawson, even more than the electrician, cursed that fact that nothing could be done. He started to search the plane again. The passengers volunteered to help him.

"Get back to your seats," an angry shout came from the control room. "This over-loaded freight car is hard enough to handle without you moving around and changing the trim. Stay put, all of you. If you've got to move, do it one at a time."

The passengers returned to their seats and Dawson continued the search alone. He found what he had found the other times he had searched—nothing.

Dawson, the grim pressure of unnamed fears creeping through his mind, went back to his seat.

What the hell had happened to Jecke?

Wind whipped the ship, made it shiver in the icy blasts, reminding him that down below them was frozen wilderness, the great north country, the land of the midnight sun. Down there under the laboring plane was snow and ice and desolation and death. An unknown land, much of it unexplored. In centuries to come air routes would cross the Pole but those centuries were not yet. The northern land still kept its ancient silence. Even the best maps of this country showed more blank spaces than anything else.

The northern lights flickered across the sky like caravans of ghosts making a pilgrimage from earth out into the wastes between the planets.

Dawson tried to think. Jecke couldn't have vanished. Jecke had vanished. Like a rat trapped in a maze from which there is no exit his mind went round and round and came back always to the same starting point. What was impossible couldn't happen.

It had happened.

Something else happened. The plane dropped into a steep left bank. Dawson found himself, Carson, and Duwe in a mad tangle on one side of the ship. Somewhere up ahead of him two girls were screaming. The muffled throb of the motors had suddenly grown to a vicious whine.

"What the hell has happened?"

"Are we falling?"

As abruptly as it had gone into a left bank, the plane righted itself, and promptly went into a right bank that was just as steep as the left one had been. Dawson found himself back in his own seat only now Carson and Duwe were on top of him. The plane was literally standing on one wing tip.

"What's the matter with you pilots?" he heard someone shout.

"Get this crate under control!" a second person added.

The plane was vibrating like a gigantic harp. It creaked and popped as the stout framework tried to adjust to the new stresses imposed on it. The pilots were fighting to get the ship under control. Somewhere up there in the nose pressure was being applied. Slowly, slowly, the ship came out of the bank, rode again on an even keel. The passengers tried to untangle themselves.

"What the hell is going on here?"

Dawson started for the pilot's compartment. He reached it much quicker than he had planned. The ship went into a steep nose drive. Dawson lost his balance, was hurled forward. He hit the door with a thud that sent shooting stars through his mind.

Crash!

There was a gigantic, ripping sound. The roar of the motors died. Then the ripping roar came again. Dawson was swallowed up in a rushing blackness.

WHEN consciousness returned, Dawson was aware, first of all, that someone was working over him. Then he was aware of the flashlight beams moving near him. Then he was aware of a man cursing.

He sat up.

Jean Parker turned anxious eyes on him. "Are you all right?" she questioned.

"I think so," Dawson answered slowly. He was not at all sure about this. His head was one dull ache. He felt tenderly of his skull and his probing fingers found a lump that had not been there before.

"You may have a concussion," the nurse said anxiously. "I don't think you have but there is no way of knowing without X-rays—"

"Then we'll just have to get along without knowing. I've got a hard head and it'll take a lot of breaking. Did we crash?"

"Yes."

"Anyone killed?"

"No. No one even badly injured. The plane hit in a snow bank, fortunately. Luckily it didn't catch on fire."

The girl was badly scared.

The man began swearing again.

"Of all the ignorant, blind, impossible nitwits, you're the worst I've ever met," he said.

"Who's that?" Dawson asked.

"Fletcher, the pilot," the nurse answered. "I think he is suffering from shock. The others are trying to restrain him."

Dawson could see a group gathered around the pilot, who was sitting in the snow. He got groggily to his feet. Captain Duwe was bending over Fletcher with a hypodermic needle in one hand. "Let me have your arm," Duwe was saying.

Fletcher jerked the arm away. "I'm not hurt. I've told you that a dozen times already. When are you going to believe me?"

"Easy, old man," the doctor soothed. "Just let me have your arm. After you take a nice little nap you'll be all right."

Fletcher would have none of it. "I'm scared," he admitted. "I'm worse scared than I've ever been in all my life, but I'm not hurt, physically." He began to swear again and Dawson saw that he was talking to the co-pilot.

"Why in the hell couldn't you see me?" he demanded.

The co-pilot didn't answer.

"I was lying right there in the back of the control room when that thing was trying to fly the ship and I couldn't move a muscle and you sat there like a knot on a log and couldn't see me."

"What's this?" Dawson interrupted.

"It's you, is it?" Fletcher said grimly. "You were up front often enough. Why didn't *you* see me?"

"Why didn't I see you? Damn it, man, what are you saying? I did see you. I talked to you. You helped me search the plane for Jecke."

"I did nothing of the kind," the big pilot raged and Dawson knew at last the source of the rage. Fletcher was scared, badly scared. He was swearing in an effort to recover his courage.

WITH the pilot's next words, Dawson knew why he was scared. The words were enough to scare anybody.

"*It* helped you search the plane," Fletcher said. "I didn't do it. I was lying behind the control chair, not able to move a muscle, which was where it told me to get when it came into the cabin. I saw it talking to you, heard it order you out of the cabin, then later I saw it turn over the controls to Greer and go back and pretend to help you search. The thing you were searching for was with you all the time. It looked like me but it wasn't me. Of all the damned blind fools I ever saw, you and Greer are the worst."

The pilot was raging. He glared angrily at Dawson. When he finished speaking, there was silence in the little group. Captain Duwe looked at Carson. Neither said a word. Tice was looking around into the darkness. The ground was covered with snow. Clumps of stunted cedars were visible, dark shadows against the whiteness of the snow. Somewhere far off in the night a wolf was howling.

"Sorry," Fletcher said abruptly. "I was calling you names because I was scared. I didn't mean it. Wasn't your fault because you couldn't see me. *It* wouldn't let you see me, just as it wouldn't let me call out to you. Felt

like I was paralyzed. Couldn't move a muscle. Knew Greer was in the same fix. He thought I was flying the plane. *It* wanted him to think that. If he had thought anything else, it would have put the stoppers on him too."

Dawson looked at Captain Duwe. "Is he insane?" he whispered.

"Don't ask me," the physician answered.

"Huh!" Fletcher grunted. "Now it's me. When you came into the cabin saying a man was missing, it was you who insisted you weren't nuts."

Dawson swallowed. His eyes went over the wreck of the giant transport, strayed off into the snow-bright darkness. He wished the damned wolf would stop howling. It was moaning off there in the darkness as though it was afraid too.

"Start at the beginning," he said.

Fletcher got to his feet, pulled a cigarette from the pocket of his leather jacket, lit it. His hands were shaking with something other than cold. He put them into his pockets.

"What was the name of that fellow you were hunting for?"

"Jecke."

"Jecke, huh? Well, somebody shoved the door of the cabin open and I looked around to give him hell. It was Jecke. I didn't give him any hell. He looked at me. And as he looked, something seemed to reach into my brain and grab every nerve in it. I was paralyzed.

" 'Get up,' " it said.

"I got up. Greer didn't seem to notice anything that was happening and I knew he was paralyzed too. It made me crawl in behind the seat and it took my place. As it was taking my place, I noticed it had changed. Jecke had a mole on his cheek. The mole was gone now. Jecke had changed. He wasn't Jecke any longer. He was *me!*. He looked like me, spoke like me; his clothes looked like my clothes—"

"I thought it was you," Greer spoke up. "I didn't know until just before we crashed that it wasn't you at the controls."

"You didn't see me, the real me, behind the chair?" Fletcher challenged the co-pilot.

"No," Greer answered firmly.

"You didn't notice me either?" Fletcher said, looking accusingly at Dawson.

THE G-man shook his head. "What happened next?" he questioned. Cold winds were blowing up his back. The two nurses had huddled together. Tice, Graydon, Duwe, and Carson stood without moving.

"You came in," Fletcher said. "You claimed a man was missing. *It* got up and helped you hunt for the man who was missing, after turning the controls over to Greer. It helped you hunt all over the plane. Then it came back and took the controls itself. I could see it grinning when it came back, grinning and chuckling, as though it had just pulled the best joke in the world and was dying to laugh about it."

"And then?"

"It stuck its head back into the main cabin and yelled there was a weather front up ahead and we had to go around it. Then it changed the course of the plane. There was some place it wanted to reach and it was taking the plane there, only—"

"Only what?"

"Only it didn't know how to fly the ship. It didn't know how to handle the stick. It lost control. The crate slipped into a left bank and it jerked the stick too far in the opposite direction. You know what happened after that."

They knew all right what happened after that.

Dawson's mind was trying to run

away with him. One thought was thundering through his brain. *"I must watch this man carefully. He has intuitive intelligence and is dangerous."* He knew now the source of that thought! *It!*

It had been sitting beside him. It had looked like Jecke. It wasn't Jecke. It was something else.

"I boarded that plane looking for a spy," he said slowly. "A German. It begins to look as if there wasn't a German on the ship. But there was something else—"

He tried to think what that something else might be. His mind revolted at the task. Years of conditioning had grooved his brain. It resisted being jolted out of its grooves. It didn't want to think about that something else. He forced it to its task.

"What happened—does anyone know—after the crash, what happened to *it?*"

A tremor of fear passed through the group as he spoke. That was the question. What had happened to it?

"I saw something," Tice spoke slowly, looking out into the snow-brightened darkness. "I was thrown clear of the ship and I saw something jump out of the wreck and go running off into the night. At the time, I thought I was out of my mind, but now—now—" His voiced died to a whisper.

"Lend me your flashlight," Dawson said to Captain Duwe.

Tice reluctantly led the way. The flash provided plenty of light.

"It went this way," Tice said.

There were tracks in the snow. Tice had seen it. It had left a trail behind it as it fled.

The tracks were not of a shape that could have been made by human feet. They were too small, for one thing. For another, they were not the right shape. The thing that had run through the snow from the wrecked plane left prints behind it that looked as if they had been made by hoofs.

CHAPTER IV

Hoof Prints in the Snow

"IS EVERYTHING ready?" Dawson asked.

"Ready," Fletcher answered. He patted his bulging pockets to make sure. Dawson and the big pilot had raided the contents of the packing cases the wrecked plane had carried. The big cargo carrier had been heavily loaded with supplies for Base X, food, heavy clothing for the workers at the arctic outpost, plane parts. The spare parts were of no value to them but the food and the clothing were a God-send. Greer, the co-pilot, was already trying to patch together some kind of an emergency radio transmitter. Under the able leadership of Carson, the others were improvising shelters. Using metal from the torn wings, they were building a hut in the middle of a clump of cedars. Already they had a fire going.

If Greer could patch together some kind of a radio transmitter, they were certain of being rescued quickly. If he couldn't, well, a search would certainly be made for them and the chances were that they would be found in time. However the plane had been taken far off its course and the rescuers would not know where to look. This arctic country was big and barren. It was also cold. Dawson was grateful for the heavy parka and the special boots he had found in the smashed crates. Without them, he and Fletcher could not do what they had planned.

They were going to follow the hoof marks in the snow, the trail of the thing that had been in the plane. It had galloped in long strides and the tracks were easily followed.

"We're a couple of damn fools," the big pilot said, as they took up the trail.

Dawson nodded agreement but said nothing. In silence the other passengers watched them go. One by one the others had tried to persuade them not to go. Dawson had stubbornly refused.

"But in heaven's name, why?" Jean Parker had demanded.

"If things like that exist on earth, I want to know more about them," Dawson had answered. Fletcher had insisted on accompanying him. Pilots usually don't scare easily. Dawson was glad to have the big man along.

They followed the trail of the fleeing thing. The dry snow crunched under their feet. The northern lights played their color organ against the backdrop of the sky. Far-off, the wolf was still howling.

"Those things can be bad medicine, if they're hungry enough," Fletcher said, nodding toward the sound.

Dawson patted his pocket in answer.

"I got a gun too," Fletcher said. "I'm only hoping we will find something we can use them against."

Dawson knew the pilot was not talking about the wolves. He was talking about *it*. Would a pistol bullet effect it?

What in the name of heaven was it? Apparently it had boarded the plane looking so much like Art Jecke that one of Jecke's closest friends had thought it was he. Its disguise had slipped only once, when the mole had changed from the left to the right cheek, and that might not have been accident. Maybe it was laughing at Dawson then, testing him, to see if he would notice so slight a change.

"But what can it be?" Fletcher asked.

"Anything we think it can be will be wrong," Dawson answered.

"What do you mean?"

"It is obviously entirely outside the range of our experience. Consequently anything we think about it will probably not fit. Our minds are conditioned to accept the facts of the world as we have found it. We've never found anything like this before and we don't have any basis or thinking about it. I've quit trying to think about it. I'm just waiting to see, and between you and me, I don't know whether I'm so darned anxious to find out. I don't mind admitting I'm scared."

"Hell, I know that," Fletcher exploded. "Anybody with any sense would be scared. But I'm damned if I'm going to run from danger or sit around and wait for it to come and get me. I'm going out to face it because I know—"

"You'll go nuts if you do anything else," Dawson supplied. "Me, too."

He was keeping his mind under rigid control, forcing himself not to think. Thinking brought madness following after it. Or had he already gone mad? Or was he dead? Maybe the plane had crashed and he had died and he and the pilot were walking across some snowy hell following the trail of a demon.

He clamped down on such thinking. That way lay madness. But he could not help wondering if following the trail of the thing that had fled from the ship would also end in madness. Or in something worse!

"IT SEEMS to know where it's going," Dawson said.

The tracks went in a straight line in one direction. They detoured to avoid deep drifts and the worst tangles of the stunted cedars but they kept going due north. Only someone who knew exactly where he was going would leave a trail like this. Dawson didn't like the way the trail went. If the thing that had fled from the ship knew where it was going, then it was keeping a rendezvous somewhere here in this frozen

northland where nothing could live.

Fletcher made the same deduction "I think it boarded the plane because the ship was coming north," the big pilot said. "It's trying to reach this section of the country. But what gets me is what was it doing down in the United States? And—holy hell—how many of those things do you suppose there are back home?"

"No way of knowing," Dawson said. "If it could impersonate Art Jecke well enough to fool me, it could fool anybody."

The thought sent a shiver through him. Your best friend might be—something else! You would never know.

The tracks of a wolf joined the trail of the thing that fled.

"Uh!" Fletcher said. "It's being stalked. I wonder—"

"I'm wondering, too. Is it armed? A wolf is bad medicine if it happens to be hungry. Of course wolves usually don't attack humans, but—"

"But it isn't human!" Fletcher grimly added.

"We'll see what we shall see."

They saw. The wolf tracks ran along with the tracks of the thing. Then they found the wolf.

It was stretched out in the snow, dead. Dawson examined it. There was not a mark on the body of the wolf.

"This settles it," Dawson said.

"S-s-settles what?" There was a sudden stutter in the pilot's speech.

"We're going back and wait for daylight."

"By God, I'm willing," the big pilot said in relief. "Following that thing in this half light is a little too much for me."

They began to retrace their steps. Something that made a sound like a great wind passed through the sky above them. Dawson looked up. In the frozen depths of the sky, the stars twinkled far away. There was nothing that he could see, but the rushing sound of a great wind was audible above them.

"Holy mackerel, what's that?" Fletcher whispered.

Dawson shook his head. The night was quiet. There was no air stirring at the ground level, but far overhead a tornado of wind was passing. It died away to the south.

"My nerves," Dawson said quietly, "can stand just so much. That wolf, dead without a mark on its body, was just about enough for me. Now this happens. Fletcher, if I suddenly start laughing—"

"I'll slug you," the pilot said. "And you do the same for me."

The snow crunched under their feet as they walked. All around them was the vast Arctic silence. It was perhaps half an hour later when Dawson, in the lead, suddenly stopped and looked up at the sky.

"There it is again," he whispered.

The tornado of wind was walking again through the upper reaches of the air. It came up from the south, passed directly overhead, then disappeared to the north. Somewhere in the distance a lonely wolf began to howl.

"*He* heard it, too," Fletcher said. "He's scared and he's howling at it. And I don't blame him."

"Tomorrow," Dawson said, "we'll find out what this is all about."

AT THIS time of the year and in this country there were about five hours of daylight. In that time he hoped to be able to follow the trail of the hoofed feet to—wherever they had gone. To follow that trail in the half light of this northern night was to invite the same fate that the wolf had found. In the daylight they could see

where the tracks were leading. If *it* knew they were following and laid in wait, they might see it before it struck, if there was light to see.

They topped a slight rise.

"Well, there's the ship," Fletcher said, relief in his voice. "Hello! The fire's out."

Dawson had already recognized the slight rise. As they had come out, they had crossed this ridge and looking back had seen the splintered wreckage in the starlight. The fire had been plainly visible from here.

It was not visible now.

The snow-filled depression, dark with clumps of cedars, lay below them.

"I guess maybe I'm mixed up," Fletcher said. "I guess the ship is over the next rise."

"I hope," Dawson said, starting hastily forward. "I hope you're right."

Minutes later he knew that Fletcher had been right—the first time. This was the place where the big transport had skidded on its belly through the drifts of snow, finally knocking its wings off in a clump of cedars just before it came to rest. This was the place where it had landed, where the passengers had built a fire and had been improvising a shelter against the biting northern cold.

The fire was out.

The wreckage of the plane, every twisted, battered piece of metal, was gone.

So were the passengers.

Sub-zero cold flowed in pounding surges through Dawson's heart. The wreckage of the ship, the passengers, Carson, Duwe, Tice, the two girls—gone.

There was no doubt that this was the place. The long groove the plane had gouged in the snow proved it. The footprints of the passengers, the ashes of the fire—still warm—proved that this was the place. This was it, all right. But what had happened?

Behind him, Dawson could hear Fletcher breathing heavily. Suddenly the big pilot began to laugh.

Smack!

Dawson's fist went home against the pilot's chin. Fletcher turned head over heels, landed in a snowdrift. He came out snorting with anger, but he wasn't laughing.

"Okay," he mumbled as his rage subsided. "You did the right thing by smacking me."

"Are you all right now?"

"I am certainly not all right, but I've got control of myself, if that is what you mean. You should have let me go nuts and be in peace. It would have been better than this."

"I know," said Dawson grimly.

In silence they searched the site. The trampled snow and the broken cedars were the only indications that the plane had crashed here. Every bit of metal from the ship, every fragment of the cargo it had carried, had been removed. The only evidence to show what had happened were marks in the snow.

Hoofprints! Hoofprints everywhere! The same kind of hoofprints they had been following.

"*It* came back," Dawson said. "It brought others like it. They cleared up the wreckage, took it with them. They took the passengers along, too."

"It came back?" Fletcher whispered.

Dawson pointed to the hoofprints.

"All right," the pilot gulped. "But how did it come? And how did they carry away all the stuff that was here? That plane weighed a lot of tons. How could they carry that off?"

In answer, Dawson walked away, circled the spot, keeping his flashlight focused on the snow. He was looking for hoofprints coming and going. The snow was unmarked.

"There is only one way they could have come and gone," he said.

"The tornado that passed above us!" Fletcher gulped.

Dawson nodded.

CHAPTER V

The Secret of the Wilderness

LONG before daylight the next morning, they started north again, following the trail of the thing that had been in the ship. They came to the body of the wolf and kept going. The country began to change. The barren flatlands gave way to low hills and these in turn gave way to a range of low mountains. Although neither of them knew it, geologists, poking into this section, had claimed that these were the oldest mountains on earth.

The tracks led to a bluff against a hill. There were caves in this bluff. The tracks went into the first cave.

They came out again and continued on.

Dawson and Fletcher followed. They were moving cautiously now, taking advantage of every bit of cover, studying the lay of the land ahead of them before they ventured forward.

The tracks went into a second cave, came out again.

"Maybe it was looking for a place to lay up last night," Fletcher suggested. "Maybe it was looking for a dry, warm cave."

"I think it was looking for a cave, all right," Dawson hazarded. "It came straight here, so it must have known what it was looking for. But—"

For a moment he let his mind speculate on why the thing should be looking for a cave, if that was what it was looking for. He could think of no reason for its action. The bluff rose straight up for hundreds of feet, a gray mass of weather-beaten rock that had been cast up here when the planet was in formation. No, there was no obvious reason why the thing should come here.

It *had* come here. There must be a reason somewhere, if he could grasp it, just as there must be a reason for everything else, including the roaring wind that had walked through the upper reaches of the sky the night before. The wind had not come again.

"Come on," Dawson said.

They moved cautiously forward, following the trail of the hoofed feet around the boulders at the base of the bluff.

The tracks entered a third cave.

This time they didn't come out. The snow at the mouth of the cave plainly revealed where the tracks entered. It also revealed that they did not come out again.

"It's in there!" Fletcher whispered. "Cripes, Dawson, now that we know where it is, what are we going to do?"

"We're going in, too," the G-man answered.

"Uck!" Beneath its day-old growth of whiskers the pilot's face whitened. "Hell, man, be sensible," he urged. "We haven't got a chance. It's probably in there asleep. It will be certain to hear us coming and— Hell, I'd rather go into a cave that held a lion."

"So had I!" Dawson said. "But I'm going in there. You wait here."

"Wait here?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Dawson shrugged. "No use of both of us getting killed at the same time."

Fletcher's face was grim. "Nuts to you, my friend," he said cheerfully. "I didn't come just for the ride, you know. I'm going, too. Two are better than one."

Dawson grinned. He liked this big pilot. Fletcher might be scared, but

the pilot had no intention of letting fear stop him. Guns ready, they went forward together.

THEY crawled to the cave mouth. The dark hole led back into the bluff for no telling how great a distance. The interior was visible for only a few feet. Beyond that lay darkness.

What was waiting back there in that darkness, in the unseen depths of this cave? Dawson forced himself not to think about that. He listened. There was no sound within the cave. Slowly, an inch at a time, taking care not to make any noise, he crawled forward. In the icy air, his breath puffed out white before him. He could feel his heart pounding heavily.

He was completely inside the cave now. The light ended here. Beyond lay darkness. Dawson lay very still, listening. There was not a sound coming from the depths of the cave. If it was there, it was keeping quiet.

"Get ready," the G-man whispered. "I'm going to turn on my light. If anything moves, shoot first and ask questions afterwards."

In spite of the freezing cold he could feel drops of sweat running down his face. When he tried to grip the flash, he found his hand was shaking so much he could barely hold the light. He forced his muscles to be steady.

"Ready?" he whispered.

"Ready!" Fletcher answered.

The beam of the flashlight jabbed into the darkness of the cave. Dawson was expecting anything. If some monstrous shape had reared up and gibbered at them, he would not have been surprised.

The light revealed—nothing!

The cave extended straight into the cliff for about twenty yards, then came to an abrupt end.

The hole was empty. There were no turns, no branching passages, no place where even *it* would be hiding.

Dawson heard the pilot's breath whistle as he drew it in.

"This—this—this is just not possible," Fletcher almost babbled. "Those tracks came in here. It's got to be here. It's *got* to be!"

Dawson got to his feet. He could feel the sweat running all over his body now, chilling him. His muscles were trembling. Waves of icy cold were sweeping over him.

He walked back into the cave. The roof was so low he had to stoop. He reached the end, saw beyond the shadow of a doubt that the place was empty.

"It's a ghost we've been chasing!" Fletcher whispered.

"Get yourself under control," the G-man snapped. In his heart, he knew he needed to take his own advice rather than give it to Fletcher. He had been in tough places before, but never had he had to fight so hard to keep himself under control. The fear of the unknown, the dim dark fear that is in the bottom of every human mind, the fear of the dark shapes that go in the night, was on him. Unless the tracks in the snow lied, a dark shape had entered this cave.

HE TURNED the flash down. There was a little sand on the floor. It was too dry, too dust-thin to freeze.

The marks of hoofs were in the dust-thin sand! They were going into the cave. There were no tracks coming out.

It *had* come in here. Then where in hell had it gone?

"Let's get out of here," Fletcher begged. "I've had enough, more than enough. I'm no coward, I hope. I'll take my chances like the next man, but let's get out of here."

"No!" Dawson said flatly. "If we leave, we'll never find the courage to return."

"I don't want to return, not ever! Let's get out of this place while the getting is good."

"No!" The G-man's voice was hard and harsh. "In case you've forgotten it, we don't have any food. Whether we want to or not, we've got to stay here, we've got to dig to the bottom of this."

In here was horror, but outside in the fierce wilderness was death. The next blizzard that came raging down from the north would finish them off. Unless they found food—and the only food they could hope to find was the supply taken from the plane — they were dead men.

"But what are we going to do?" Fletcher demanded.

"I," said Dawson, "am going to believe my eyes. They tell me the tracks came in here, that they did not go out, and that this cave is now empty. Therefore, I— Huh!"

The last was a grunt. Projecting from the rough wall at the end of the cave was a chunk of rock. Something about it held his attention. He touched it. It seemed to give under the pressure of his fingers. He pressed harder. The back end of the cave swung inward.

It was a door! The front part of the door had been cleverly camouflaged to resemble the end of the cave. The chunk of rock was the latch that opened the door.

Here, at the end of a cave in this Arctic wilderness, was a door. *It* had passed through this door. No wonder then that its tracks had entered the cave and hadn't come out. It had been seeking this cave, it had known the door was here, it had simply gone through the door into—what?

"Phew!" Dawson whispered. "By the eternal, that's a relief. All the time we were going nuts wondering what had happened, there was a simple, commonplace explanation and we were too scared to think of it."

A door! It had been made by hands using tools. There was relief in that thought. The fear in his mind had been that the tracks did end here, that they simply came into the cave and vanished, that a supernatural agency was somehow in operation. Fletcher's remark about a ghost had jarred him more than he cared to admit.

It wasn't a ghost. It used a door. Somehow that fact seemed to relieve his terrible mental tension.

"I don't see how it is any relief," Fletcher said. "It went through a door, all right, but — who made this door? Why was it made? And—a door to what? Before I feel any better I want to know what's on the other side of that door."

"That's what we're going to do next," Dawson said. He pushed the door open a crack, looked through. A warm wind pressed against his face. Beyond the door was a tunnel. A strip of synthetic tubing like the tubing of a neon light ran along the ceiling. The tunnel, as far as he could see, was empty.

GUNS ready, they slipped silently down the tunnel. It branched into two forks and Dawson, hesitating, took the left branch.

"I'd sure like to know where we're going," Fletcher murmured.

"So would I," the Federal agent answered. The tunnels had obviously been dug. They were not natural caves. A lot of hard work and probably some very expensive machinery had been used in digging these holes. They were not recent excavations, either. The rock walls were seepage discolored.

Who had dug these tunnels here in the Arctic wilderness? Did some lost race exist up here in the vast northland? What was the explanation of this mystery?

Ahead of them the tunnel entered a large opening. They came cautiously to the opening, looking through it, and stood, speechless with surprise, gazing at what lay before them.

The tunnel had entered a huge room. They were standing on a small balcony above the floor level. To the right a flight of steps led down to the main level.

The whole hill had been hollowed out! The room was gigantic, far bigger than a football stadium. A single light set on the high ceiling poured down a flood of warm radiation. Set against one wall was what looked like a well-equipped machine shop, with lathes, stamp presses, grinders, all of it intricate and expensive machinery.

But the thing that held their eyes was a glittering, tear-drop shaped globule that seemed to fill half the room. Dawson took one look at the huge oval globule.

"A ship!" he whispered.

"Yes," Fletcher breathed heavily. "That's the ship. But, brother, that ship was never made on earth, and it was never designed to fly on this planet. I never saw one before and I never expected to see one, but I'll bet my last dollar that ship was designed and built to fly between the stars."

A star ship! The pilot's voice was heavy with wonder. The wonder grew as he spoke again.

"This whole hill has been hollowed out to make a hangar for that ship. A hangar and a repair shop! Dawson! That tornado we heard going through the air—that was this ship flying over our heads! Look! There's proof."

Piled off to one side, a mass of broken wings and bent metal, was the wreckage of their big cargo carrier. The star ship was big enough to carry the wreckage, and more.

It, the thing that had been in the plane, had come here, to the hangar of a star ship, a hidden hangar hollowed out of a hill in the northern wilderness! It, or others like it, had taken the star ship back to the wrecked plane, had brought the wreckage here. That much was obvious now. That much was clear. One question was answered. But the answer only brought other questions.

Why was this star ship here? Where had it come from? What was it doing? And—where was the crew that manned it?

The whole vast hangar was empty and untenanted. No workers were in sight, the machines stood unused, no movement was visible in or around the ship itself.

"There they are!" Dawson heard the pilot whisper.

He turned to look. He was expecting to see the thing that had fled from the ship. Instead he saw—the passengers of the big cargo carrier.

Unnoticed until now, they were sitting against the wall almost directly under Dawson and Fletcher.

CHAPTER VI

The Story of the Prisoners

THE whole group was there. With the exception of Carson, who was pacing back and forth along an imaginary line, they were sitting on the floor. They looked utterly dejected, all but the engineer, and he looked baffled.

Although there were no guards in sight and they were not restrained in any way, they were making no effort to escape. Like ship-wrecked sailors who

have lost all hope of rescue, they huddled together in despair.

"Hey—"

"Sh!" Dawson said quickly. "Don't call to them. There's something wrong somewhere."

"Hell, I know there's something wrong. But what? That's the question: what?"

"I'll go down and see," Dawson said. "You stay up here and cover me."

There was not a whisper of sound in the huge, incredible hangar as Dawson started down the steps. Fletcher crouched above. From his perch on the balcony, the pilot could see anything that moved in the big room.

Carson saw the G-man coming. A dazed, incredulous look appeared on the face of the engineer.

"Dawson? Where did you come from?" Carson whispered. Then, without waiting for an answer, he spoke again. "Get us out of here! Quickly. They're holding a big pow-wow to decide what to do with us. They're all in one of the side rooms across the hangar. Get us out of here before they reach a decision."

By that time the whole group had seen Dawson and were on their feet. Calling softly to him, they crowded along a line on the floor. Duwe, Tice, Graydon, Greer, Bee Lehn and Jean Parker—they were all here.

"Get us out of here, Dawson!" That was Duwe speaking.

"Yeah. Lift that latch so we can get out. We can't reach it from this side," Tice added.

"Hurry!" one of the girls urged him. "We don't have a second to waste. Get us out of this cage before those terrible things come back."

"This cage?" Dawson echoed. "What are you talking about?" A feeling of cold was creeping over him. What was wrong with these people? They seemed to think they were in a cage and they were urging him to open the door and release them. He didn't know what they were talking about. He heard the words they used but the sounds carried no meaning to his mind. "There is no cage," he whispered.

"No cage?" the engineer answered. Damn it, Dawson, do you mean to tell me you can't see this cage? It's right here in front of your eyes." Like a prisoner held in a cell, he extended his hands in front of him, seemed to grasp iron bars and shake them. "Can't you see these bars?" he demanded.

Not until then did Dawson intuitively realize what was happening. These people were all hypnotized. They *thought* they were in a cage. The idea had been impressed so strongly on their minds that they imagined they could see the bars of the cage, just as—he remembered—he thought he had seen Art Jecke on the plane. Hypnosis, an exceedingly strong mental suggestion, a force radiated by an extremely powerful mind, was in operation here.

THE realization gave him a clue indicating the intelligence, the mental powers, of the creatures that had dug this hangar out of a hill in the northern wilderness, that had built this vast glistening star ship. They were masters of mental science!

"There is no cage!" he said.

Doubt appeared on the faces of the passengers. He was telling them they were not in a cage.

"Are you crazy?" Carson grunted.

"Yeah. Have you gone nuts?"

"Can't you see this cage?"

"Are you blind?"

"Can't you see these iron bars. They got us penned up here like animals in a zoo."

"Walk through the bars!" Dawson said grimly.

They stared at him as if they did not understand the words he had spoken. Walk through iron bars? Had the man taken leave of his senses?

No one moved. The hypnosis that held them was so strong that words would not break it.

"Here! I'll show you," Dawson said. He stepped across the line that seemed to indicate the limits of the cage. "See!" he said triumphantly. "There aren't any bars. There isn't any cage. You are imagining these things."

Like sleep-walkers awakening, they stared at him and at each other. He had walked through the iron bars of their cage. Little by little the realization of what that meant dawned on them. Carson rubbed his eyes.

"There *isn't* any cage!" he whispered.

"It was there a minute ago," Duwe spoke. "Where did it go so quickly."

"There never was any cage," Dawson said. "You were under the influence of hypnosis and you imagined the cage. It never existed except in your imagination."

"The man is right," Carson spoke dazedly.

The hypnosis was broken! The mental chains that bound the minds of these people had been snapped. They had been hynotized into believing the cage existed but when Dawson walked through the iron bars, their minds revolted against the hypnosis.

"I know some crooks I'd like to be able to hynotize like that," Dawson thought grimly. Holding prisoners by making them imagine they were in a cage was an exceedingly clever idea, especially if the victims were unaware of what was happening. These people had been unaware of it. Now that they knew what had happened, they were dazed, bewildered, frightened. They looked like dreamers who have awakened from a nightmare and are still uncertain whether the monster they saw in their dreams was real or not. The two girls were clinging together, Carson was shaking his head, Graydon, not saying a word, was staring dazedly at the place where the bars had been.

"Watch it!" a tense whisper came from up above.

The warning came from Fletcher, crouched on the balcony.

"What is it?"

"They're coming out of a room on the other side of the ship, about eight of them. You can't see them yet but they're coming toward you. You've either got to run or get ready to fight and do it damned quickly."

THE warning brought consternation to the group below.

"Run!" Tice whispered. "It's our only chance."

"No!" Dawson said fiercely.

The surprised electrician turned toward him. "You haven't seen them or you wouldn't say that. I tell you, they're monsters. If they catch us again, we're done for."

"We're done for if we run!" Dawson snapped. "Even if we managed to escape from this hangar, we would be in the wilderness. If they didn't catch us, we would die of starvation or cold. We're going to stay right here."

"Stay here? And let them come and get us? They've been holding a powwow to decide what to do with us and they've reached a decision. If they've decided to kill us, are we going to die like rabbits, without putting up a fight?"

"No."

"But how are we going to fight if we let them get us again?"

"They think we're hypnotized," the G-man said. "We're going to let them think that. We don't want them, un-

der any circumstances, to think anything else. We're going to pretend we're still hypnotized, and wait and see what happens. It's our only chance."

In his heart, he did not think it was much of a chance. If they had had time to plan everything carefully, maybe they could make it work. But there was no time for anything but action.

"Pretend you're still hypnotized!" he said. "Act as though you think that imaginary cage is still there. Hold your minds blank. And if you must think, think about something that happened years ago. If we have to make a break, I'll give the signal for it."

Tired, frightened faces looked at him. White, sleepless, scared faces. These people were near the end of their endurance, their nerves had been whittled down to ragged edges. Fear looked out of their eyes.

Carson looked thoughtfully at Dawson. "Your idea might work," he said slowly. "It might not. But I'm willing to give it a try. I don't see anything else to do."

They were all willing to try. Their faces showed that they didn't have much hope but they would try.

"Here they come!" Jean Parker whispered.

Dawson had no time to watch the act these people were putting on. His attention was fully concentrated elsewhere. For the first time, he was seeing the thing that had been in the plane in its real form.

There were eight of them. They came trotting around the end of the star ship, their hoofs clicking on the rock floor. Dawson's first dazed impression was that somehow a race of goats had developed intelligence.

These creatures certainly looked like goats, like pictures artists drew of the great god Pan without the horns. They had shaggy, furry legs that ended in hoofs, tough, wiry bodies, sharp, pointed chins, and yellow eyes. They were small in size—no bigger than a boy of twelve—but they carried themselves with a purposefulness that indicated power and a complete knowledge of that power. They trotted directly toward the humans.

"Keep your minds blank!" Dawson whispered fiercely. He did not know exactly why but he suspected this was of the utmost importance. He forced himself to think of nothing at all. He held his breath and waited.

Would the act they were putting on fool these goat creatures? Or would it fail? So far as he could tell, the creatures trotting toward them were without weapons, unless the objects of polished crystal projecting from pockets in belts around their middles were the handles of guns. But even if no weapons were in sight, he did not doubt that they possessed them.

THEY halted directly in front of the humans.

"I am Eldron of the Ahrned," Dawson felt a voice whisper in his mind. "You will come with me."

So far, so good!

"How can we come with you unless you get us out of this damned cage?" Carson growled.

Dawson sighed with relief. The engineer had added a perfect touch. Eldron of the Ahrned fell for it.

"Oh, yes," the whisper came. "I will open the door. Then you will come with me."

Eldron went through the motions of opening an imaginary gate in an imaginary cage. One by one the humans filed out. Dawson keeping his mind as near blank as possible, was third in the line.

Eldron led them across the huge hangar. The other goat creatures

formed in the rear of the humans and Dawson had the impression that they were acting as guards.

Twenty or thirty of the Ahrned were in the room they entered. They looked up expectantly as the humans came in.

"What is the meaning of this?" Carson growled. "Why have you kidnapped us? What are you going to do with us? And—who the hell are you anyway?"

Eldron of the Ahrned was not in the least perturbed by the engineer's gruff tone of voice. Or, if he was, he kept it concealed. It was hard to tell when he was showing emotion and when he wasn't.

"No doubt you are curious as to our identity," his bland whisper came into Dawson's mind, as well as into the mind of every human present. "We are the Ahrned. As to why we kidnapped you and brought the fragments of your wrecked plane here, the reason should be obvious. Others of your kind will search for the plane and for you. For good reasons, we did not want that search to be successful."

"Um," Carson said and Dawson knew the engineer was wondering why the Ahrned did not want that search to be successful. It was not hard to find the reason. The passengers on that plane would tell a weird story of an incredible creature that had been on the ship. That story would arouse speculation, it *might* start a search that would reveal the existence of the Ahrned on earth.

"You understand," Eldron said. "We do not wish your race to know about us. In fact, your recent activities in this area—planes flying over us, a large base being constructed not too far from here, made us wonder if you had not already discovered our presence. To find an answer to that question, I was sent down into your country. Unfortunately plans could not be made for my return, which had to be accomplished in the best way I could. For this reason, I was forced to board one of your crude ships, because it would take me at least in the direction I wanted to go."

Dawson kept all traces of surprise out of his mind. He was receiving Eldron's thinking by telepathy and he suspected the Ahrned could read minds, or at least they could read strong surface thinking. Eldron, with elaborate politeness, was carrying on the conversation with Carson. The other Ahrned were quietly watching. As they watched they were distributing themselves around the walls of the room.

"But what are you doing here?" the engineer questioned. "Who are you? Where did you come from?"

ELDRON hesitated. Before he answered this question, he seemed to confer silently with his companions. Dawson caught the dim impression of thoughts flashing from mind to mind. Eldron turned again to Carson.

"We came from—" The thought was not clear, but the gesture toward the roof overhead carried a world of meaning. The Ahrned came from—somewhere overhead. Dawson caught a fleeting glimpse of vast reaches of space, of a hot sun far off across the void, of planets circling that sun. The Ahrned were celestial visitors.

This much had been obvious when the star ship had been discovered. But —why were they on earth? What were they doing here?

Eldron hesitated as though he had caught a whisper of the Federal agent's perturbed thinking. He looked around the room, his gaze going from one human to another, as if he had felt the pulse of someone's thoughts and was seeking the thinker.

"You should have no trouble in understanding why we are here," the Ahrned said at last. "You have built a base

for your crude flying machines not far from here. This hangar that you have seen, and the star ship now housed within it, is a base, but the need this base serves, instead of being on another continent, is on another star. That is why we are here, why this hidden hangar is here. It is a base that facilitates transportation between the stars!"

Star Base X! The thought thundered in Dawson's mind. Just as Base X, in Labrador, served the needs of the plane communication between the United States and England, this Ahrned base aided them in their communication between the stars. That was why it was here, hidden away in this northland. It was a base facilitating star flight.

Carson looked a little dazed at the information but he was an engineer and he had no difficulty in understanding the possible need of a base to aid in flight between the stars. The idea was startling only if you were not accustomed to thinking in terms of communication between the stars of the night.

"But why have you hidden yourselves away?" he questioned. "We would like to know about you. We would welcome you, help you, provide you with supplies. And—that ship you've got out there—I don't mind telling you how much a ship like that would mean to the human race. Star flight—for us!"

There was awe in the engineer's voice and something of a plea. He had seen a star ship and he was talking to the people who had built it. He had seen star ships before, in dreams, something that maybe would be built some day and maybe wouldn't, something hoped for, something for the future, the goal of the ambition of a race. Star ships! Flight to the planets! Flight to the fartherest star the clearest night revealed!

The engineer had forgotten where he was, he had forgotten the danger that hemmed them in, he had forgotten that he knew nothing about the Ahrned and what they might do with him and his companions. Only one thought was in his mind—a star ship for the human race. He had seen one. He was talking to the people who had built it. He now knew such ships could be built.

A dream hidden in his heart had taken on flesh and come walking into his sight. A star ship was a bright dream of adventure beyond the frozen depths of space.

"Why have you hidden yourselves from us?" Carson begged. "We would help you, do almost anything for you—"

THE thought that came back was as cold as the wind that blows in the void. "If we gave you the secret of building star ships, you would become our competitors. We have studied you humans carefully. We know the drive that is in you, the fierce, relentless ambition that is part of your race. If we taught you how to build star ships, then from the belt of the constellation that you call Orion to the flame of the Southern Cross, we would have to fight you. Oh, maybe you would keep the peace for many centuries, until you became very strong, but in time we would have to compete with you, against our own weapons. No, human, we are not that foolish, not under any circumstances. We will never reveal ourselves to your race. You will never know about us, if we can help it. Star Base X must remain a secret."

The thought trailed into silence. There was a look of frustration on Carson's face. He looked like a child that has found a glittering dreamed-of toy, and has had that toy snatched away from him.

"You won't work with us? You won't let us help you? You won't help us?"

"No!"

Carson sighed. "Then what are you going to do with us?"

"What we are going to do," Eldron answered, "is already being done."

He did not explain what he meant but the grim thought carried a terrible meaning.

Simultaneously Dawson was aware that a voice was whispering in his mind.

"Sleep—sleep—"

He had been so engrossed in the byplay of conversation between the engineer and Eldron that he had not noticed what the other Ahrned were doing. Now he saw them. They were gathered around the walls of the room. To all outward appearance, they were doing exactly nothing.

The command to sleep droning into his mind told him what the Ahrned were doing. While Eldron held the attention of the humans in conversation, the Ahrned were hypnotizing them. Intuitively Dawson knew that this hypnosis would end in death.

The Ahrned wanted their star base kept secret. They were going to destroy the humans who had stumbled on to the base.

Out of the corners of his eyes, Dawson saw his comrades. They were asleep on their feet. Duwe's eyes were closed. The doctor was visibly swaying. Any second he would fall over. Any second they would all fall over.

The thunder of Dawson's gun split the terrible silence with a roar like thunder. Eldron's goat face, suave with the thought that he had completely outwitted these humans and had led them like dumb cattle to their death, splashed into a red blur as the heavy bullet struck it.

"Wake up!" Dawson yelled at the top of his voice. Fortunately the rigid control he had kept over his own mind to keep from revealing his thinking had largely prevented the Ahrned hypnosis from taking effect on him.

"Wake up and fight!" he yelled.

His gun roared again.

CHAPTER VII

Star Base X

THE Ahrned were taken completely by surprise. They had searched the prisoners taken at the wrecked plane and had removed all weapons. To the best of their knowledge, the humans were unarmed. They had thought that the mass hypnosis would be completely in effect before the prisoners even knew what was happening, if, indeed, the humans ever learned what was in store for them. To sleep and in that sleep to dream of death, that was the Ahrned plan. With the massed minds of all the Ahrned willing sleep, the plan could not fail.

That was what the Ahrned thought. They considered themselves a superior race and they were confident of their own abilities. The idea that another person might have joined the group of humans was so preposterous that it did not occur to them.

The thunder of Dawson's gun had two effects. It startled the Ahrned, made them relax the concentration needed to put the hypnosis into effect. The deadly orders to sleep no longer flowed into the minds of the humans. The second effect of the roar of the gun was to startle the humans into instant wakefulness. For a second they stared groggily around, trying to understand what was happening. They had been almost asleep and tired as they were, sleep was a delightful experience. Why were they being so rudely awakened?

Tice it was who first seemed to realize what was happening. He launched

himself at the nearest Ahrned.

As the electrician leaped, Dawson's gun thundered for the third time. At such close quarters, he could not miss. The heavy bullets, designed to knock a man down and keep him down, knocked the slighter Ahrned into lifeless chunks of flesh.

"Get them before they get us!" Dawson shouted.

The Ahrned, for the moment, were in helpless confusion. The attack had been so sudden and so unexpected that they did not realize what was happening to them. The sleep-inducing hypnosis could not be used against an alert human who knew what was to be expected and was on guard against it. While they hesitated, Carson, Graydon, Duwe and Greer waded in.

Smack, smack-smack, thud! The sounds came from fists, hard human fists, meeting Ahrned chins, thudding against Ahrned bellies. An Ahrned screamed a command at his fellows and the scream shuddered into silence as a fist knocked teeth down his throat.

The humans might not have weapons, but they had their fists and the will to fight. They waded into the fight with such a will that for a mad second Dawson hoped they might win it. The disorganized Ahrned were being knocked senseless so fast he could not count them fall.

Then one of the Ahrned got his wits about him. His hand dived to the crystal ornament projecting from the belt around his middle. Out from the pocket holster came a crazily-shaped object made of glass. Tice was the nearest human to him. He pointed it at the electrician.

The object might have been crazily shaped but there was nothing crazy about the way it operated. A finger beam of furious light lanced from it.

Tice, a hole burned through his heart, never knew what hit him.

Dawson shot the weapon out of the Ahrned's hands before he could point it at anyone else. Duwe, it was, who saw it fall and leaped for it. He was a stout-hearted little doctor. His life had been devoted to dealing men's ailments but now that the crisis had come he showed himself as good a fighter as the best of them.

He burned smoking holes in two of the Ahrned before he in turn went down.

THE Ahrned outnumbered the humans three to one before the battle started. Dawson's only hope was that the aliens were unarmed. He saw now that it was a false hope. The Ahrned had weapons, dangerous, deadly weapons, as alien and as powerful as they themselves were.

Counting the cartridges left in his gun, Dawson shot two of the Ahrned, getting both of them with one bullet. Two less to get! But there were too many left.

Graydon choked and slid to the floor and one of the nurses coughed heavily and fell beside him. Those two girls had been in the fight since it started. Now there was only one left. The Ahrned, grouped together and all with weapons drawn, were closing in for the kill.

It was all over, it was all done, it was finished. So far as the human race was concerned, the secret of Star Base X would remain a secret. The Ahrned had suffered casualties but they were winning. Dawson dodged a finger of raging light aimed at him, pulled the trigger of his gun, saw the Ahrned collapse who had shot at him. The room was hideous with the gleaming pencil beams from the weapons of the aliens.

Suddenly it was hideous with something else.

The thunder of a gun!

The noise was deafening. Somewhere in that room a man was triggering a gun as fast as he could work his fingers. Dawson, already down to one knee from his efforts to dodge the beams of Ahrned, threw himself flat on the floor. He looked over his shoulder, seeking the source of this burst of gun fire.

The door through which they had entered was open. Fletcher was standing in it. The pilot was doing the shooting. Lead from the gun in his hand was smashing into the massed Ahrned.

"Come on!" he yelled at someone behind him. "We've got 'em cornered. All we have to do is mow 'em down."

One of the Ahrned attempted to bring up his own ray weapon. The big pilot took careful aim, blasted the Ahrned to the floor. At the same time, he leaped into the room.

Dawson, rolling, fired the last cartridge in his gun, hurled the weapon at the Ahrned, and charged them with Fletcher.

The pilot was yelling at the top of his voice. "Come on, boys, and get in the kill!"

Even then Dawson found time to wonder where Fletcher had got reinforcements. The Ahrned did not take time to wonder. They broke, raced through a side door. Fletcher slammed it shut behind them.

There was sudden silence in the room. The pilot looked around, saw the bodies on the floor. "Jumping balls of fire!" he whispered. "Was this a battle! I heard the shooting start and took a chance on busting in."

"Where—where did you find the reinforcements?" Dawson gulped.

"Reinforcements?" The pilot seemed puzzled.

"Yes. You were shouting to someone that you had them cornered, to come on and help you clean up. Where—"

"Oh," Fletcher grinned. "Hell, I just imagined that party. I thought it might impress these goat devils in here. From the way they took air, it must have impressed 'em, too."

"I'll say it did!" Dawson answered. "Now if you can only imagine what we are going to do next— What's that?"

The sound of the beginning wind was audible in the room. It came from the door through which the pilot had entered, from the main hangar.

It was the same sound that Dawson and Fletcher had heard moving through the upper air the night before. Dawson leaped to the door.

The star ship was moving. The sound of rushing wind came from it.

"They ducked out of here and ran for the ship!" Fletcher shouted.

Controlled by automatic machinery, the great doors of the hangar were swinging open. Outside was visible the brightness of the snow.

With a roar of wind like the sound of a tornado, the great ship leaped out—and up. It moved with tremendous acceleration and was gone almost before it seemed to be in motion.

"They've taken a run-out powder!" Fletcher gulped. "They thought the joint was surrounded and they took it on the lam."

"And that," Dawson said, "is exactly what we are going to do—but fast!"

THEY were out of the hangar, those who remained alive, Carson, Greer, Jean Parker and Fletcher. As he had never driven anyone in his life, Dawson drove them away.

"Faster, faster, faster!" was the only word he spoke.

"But we can't leave that hangar," Fletcher protested. "Our food is there. We'll freeze to death out here in this wilderness. We've got to stay here. There aren't any more of those goat

devils left. What kind of fool's business is this anyhow?"

"Fletcher is right," Carson panted. "We've got to stay there. There are tools in that hangar, spare parts, enough equipment to give us a tip on how that ship operated."

Carson had seen a star ship. Even if the ship was gone, he was unwilling to leave the hangar that had housed it.

"We may be able to find out how that ship worked," he protested.

"That's what I'm afraid of!" Dawson answered grimly. "Ah! There it is now. Duck for cover."

The tornado of wind was moving again up in the sky. The star ship was coming back!

They cowered under a clump of cedars on the opposite hillside. The star ship hurtled over the hangar it had vacated. A dark object dropped from it, plummeted downward.

Boom!

The air rolled from the fury of the blast. The ground gathered itself in waves that seemed to bounce up and down. Great boulders lifted themselves up to the summit of the sky, fell slowly downward. For minutes afterward there was a continuous rain of smaller fragments.

On the opposite hillside, where the hangar had been, a great gaping hole appeared. From that hole a pillar of smoke was already reaching into the sky.

The star ship turned upward. The sun's rays glinted on it as it leaped out to space. For a moment it hung in the air, a rapidly diminishing, gleaming mote of light. Then it was gone.

"Oh," Fletcher said. "I see. I see, I see."

IT WAS not an hour later when the great Liberator bomber came down on a long slant and circled the column of smoke rising from the ruined hangar. The humans on the hillside waved frantically at it.

"They're out looking for our plane," Fletcher shouted. "They've seen the smoke and are coming to investigate. Will those damned idiots in the plane ever see us?"

The big ship droned lower and lower, circling this strange pillar of smoke in the northern sky. Suddenly it banked toward the hillside, passed directly overhead, wiggled its wings, and took a bee line south.

"They've seen us!" Fletcher exulted. "When they come back, it will be to bring help."

The next day brought food, blankets, clothing parachuted from the sky. Later still, hurrying dog teams arrived from Base X.

Carson left the site with extreme reluctance. He seemed to think that even in the blasted, burned, charred wreckage of the hangar there might be some clue that would enable him to discover how the star ship flew.

"Some day," he consoled himself. "Some day I'll know how that thing operated. We'll be building ships like that some day, now that we know they can be built."

"And when that day comes the Ahrned will find they have really gained some competitors in the sky," Dawson added.

He did not doubt that the day would come. Star flight for the human race was a part of the shape of things to be. He was quite content to wait until that day dawned.

★ ★ ★ BUY MORE BONDS! ★ ★ ★

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By Lt. LYNN STANDISH

Benjamin Silliman

He was the founder of the "American Journal of Science and Arts." Sillimanite was named in his honor

BENJAMIN SILLIMAN, American chemist and geologist, was born on August 8, 1779, at Trumbull, Connecticut. He was the son of a general who served in the Revolutionary War Entering Yale University in 1792, he graduated in 1796, and in 1802 was appointed professor of chemistry, geology, mineralogy and pharmacy; a combination of instructional duties which not only indicates his broad proficiency as a teacher, but also the unspecialized nature of the scientific curriculum, even in institutions of high standing, early in the last century.

He was a man of unusual personal charm, highly honored by all who knew him for his ability, and greatly admired by his pupils. For sixty-two years he filled this position, the last eleven as professor emeritus. He did much to improve and extend the college's educational resources, especially in regard to its mineralogical collections, the Trumbull gallery, the Medical institution and the Sheffield Scientific school. Outside Yale he was well known as one of the few men in America who could hold the attention of a popular audience with a scientific lecture.

In the early years of his career he was a confirmed believer in the geological views held and taught by Werner at Freiberg; and when Lyell's great work "The Principles of Geology" appeared (1830-1833), in which totally different explanations were advanced to account for the observed facts in that branch of study, he was unable to fall in line with the new trend of thought, though many passages in his writings, and even in his lectures, may be cited, that indicate doubt as to Werner's theories.

One of these, dated in 1821, is especially interesting. After giving a description of the vast areas in New England, New York and eastern Canada, over which are found the rounded boulders and pebbles, and the ridges and sheets of gravel, now summarized under the general name of "glacial drift," and accounted for by the well-established theory of continental glaciation, and which by Werner were ascribed to the Noachian Deluge, he wrote—"these have ever struck me as among the most interesting of geological occurrences, and as being very inadequately accounted for by existing theories."

Silliman's original investigations were neither numerous nor important, and his name is best known to scientific men as the founder, and from 1818 to 1838 the sole editor, of the "American Journal of Science and Arts"—often called *Silliman's Journal*—one of the foremost American scientific serials. From the magazine's inception it has ranked as a leading technical periodical and when Silliman died at New Haven, Connecticut, on November 24, 1864, his son became editor.

With Dr. Hare, Silliman was the inventor of the compound blowpipe, an improvement on the instrument designed by Plattner of the Frieberg Mining Academy in Saxony, a tool which was much in use during the last century among mineralogists, in the preliminary examination of ores of the metals, and of rocks in general. He was the first to identify that rather unusual variety of aluminum silicate which occurs in the form of long and slender crystals of a greenish brown color in the older rocks, and which, in his honor was given the name of sillimanite.

As a lecturer on geology he was always able to command a large audience, and during his active years gave many courses that were very effective in disseminating among the people a knowledge of the discoveries constantly being made in those branches of science which he had made his specialty. And, like his great contemporary Faraday, he possessed the ability of talking to the people on technical subjects, in language that all could understand.

UNDER COVER

By Pvt. JAMES NELSON

HAVE you been having much trouble buying your favorite cleaning fluid? Well, don't get angry for, like so many other civilian items, it has gone to war.

The cleaning fluid, known as perchlorethylene, has been converted by DuPont chemists into hexachlorethane. This new compound, when mixed with a fine metallic zinc, produces zinc chloride. However, so much heat is also produced that the zinc chloride is vaporized and a heavy cloud of white smoke results.

Seeing the great possibilities of this compound, the chemical warfare branch of the army has adopted it for use on the fighting fronts to protect our soldiers and on the home front to hide our cities if we are ever bombed.

The THINKING CAP

By Sgt. WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Reggie, they said, was an amiable idiot. Then he went to college—in an insane asylum!

Reggie was in his element as the flow of technical phrases rolled smoothly from his lips

ON A brisk autumn morning Reginald van Porter shoved his way through the revolving doors of his swanky apartment hotel, feeling a mellow glow of satisfaction and contentment somewhere in the region of his heart.

He paused under the canopy that extended from the entrance of the hotel to the street and nodded benignly to the uniformed doorman.

"Great day, what?" he said enthusiastically.

The doorman nodded.

"I mean," Reggie went on, determined to make himself absolutely clear, "it's one of those days that Nature pops as a surprise. Makes a man feel absolutely pious."

He drew a deep breath of the keen autumn air and stretched his arms wide. "I mean, it's just one of those days."

The doorman eyed Reggie's tweed-coated figure with sour disapproval. In his opinion—and he was a thoughtful, discerning man—Reginald van Porter was a blooming ass. He had nothing against the young man personally and he had never heard any scandalous reports of his conduct, but there was just something in the vacantly cheerful attitude with which Reggie surveyed life that annoyed him profoundly.

"I see what you mean, sir," he said.

ILLUSTRATED BY MAGARIAN

"Shall I call you a cab?"

"No," Reggie said, taking another deep breath. "I'm waiting for a lift from Jonathan Sloan." The mention of the name caused a fleeting shadow to flit across his normally cheerful face. "Dr. Jonathan Sloan, the eminent young nerve specialist."

He brooded for a moment, gnawing solemnly at a finger of his pigskin glove. Finally he turned thoughtfully to the doorman.

"I say, Thomas, would you care to marry a nerve specialist?"

Thomas raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Considering everything, sir," he said politely, "I'd rather not."

"Oh, I don't mean that," Reggie said hastily. "I mean if you were a very lovely girl with dark hair and beautiful blue eyes, then would you want to marry this nerve blighter?"

"Is there any alternative for this young lady?" Thomas inquired.

"Yes, indeed!" said Reggie emphatically. "She could marry me instead of the nerve chap."

"I see, sir."

"Of course you do," Reggie said. He regarded Thomas with dubious eyes. "Well, what would you do?"

"The young lady's course would seem to be obvious," Thomas said.

Reggie smiled cheerfully.

"It's a relief to hear you say that, Thomas." He smiled for a few seconds and then he suddenly realized that the doorman's answer had been slightly ambiguous. He frowned worriedly.

"But, Thomas——"

"Will you excuse me, sir?" Thomas said. "I think the desk clerk needs me." He turned and marched through the revolving doors with aloof dignity.

Reggie walked to the curb, still frowning.

"Good chap, Thomas," he muttered. "Mind of his own."

A CAR turned into the street and pulled to a stop in front of the hotel canopy. A dark, serious young man with heavy glasses was seated behind the wheel. He wore a somber fedora set squarely on his head and his clothes were quietly conservative. There was something solid and substantial about this young man that impressed and reassured everyone he met.

"Here," a person would say to himself, meeting him, "is a person of character and ideals."

This quality of solidity in Jonathan Sloan was what had made him, at the age of thirty-five, one of the most distinguished nerve specialists in the city of Chicago.

Reggie looked at his watch in pleased astonishment.

"Why," he said, "you're right on the dot!"

"I am always on time," Jonathan said quietly. "A person who can't keep appointments is, in my opinion, suffering from a form of mental unbalance."

"Is that so?" Reggie said, climbing into the front seat, alongside the young nerve specialist. The solid, powerful car moved away from the curb slowly as Reggie settled himself comfortably. He risked a side glance at Jonathan's stern, serious profile, debating the advisibility of telling him the side-splitting story he had heard the night before at the club. With a sigh he decided that it would be a waste of time. What Alice saw in this straight-faced bloke . . .

"Frankly," Jonathan said, "I was rather surprised to hear from you last night. I didn't know that you were going down to the Montmacy's for the week end." He drove along for a moment in a dour silence. "Alice didn't mention it to me," he said in a severe voice which implied that Alice damn well *should* have. "Are you sure she

expected you today?"

"Why, yes, I guess so," Reggie said. He pointed out the window at two cows grazing in a meadow alongside the road. "What do you suppose those biffers think about all day?"

"You *guess* so," Jonathan said sharply, displaying no interest in the cerebral habits of Reggie's cows. "Do you mean to tell me you aren't sure?"

Reggie shifted uneasily. Jonathan always made him feel as if he were on the witness stand, defending himself for annoying young girls.

"Well," he said, "I talked to Alice in the middle of the week and she invited me down for Saturday or Sunday, I don't remember which. When I found out you were driving down today I decided to cadge a lift, as it were."

"This is terrible," Jonathan said in a hollow, despairing voice. They had left the city limits and were driving through the open country. The lake was to their left, sparkling and blue in the morning sun; at their right were the large, well-kept estates of the suburb of Glencoe. "I can't drop you off here," Jonathan said. "It's miles from the train."

"What's so terrible about me coming down a day early?" Reggie asked. "Are they going to butcher an old aunt, or something?"

"Please!" Jonathan said frostily. "I don't find such vulgar allusions amusing." He frowned over the steering wheel. "Alice's father, Professor Thaddeus Montmacy, is holding one of his Saturday evening salons tonight. Naturally only the most intelligent sort of people are invited to attend. I am afraid that your presence may annoy Professor Montmacy. Alice obviously invited you down for *tomorrow*. She certainly wouldn't be thoughtless enough to have you down for her father's salon."

"Well," said Reggie, "can't I just keep out of the way tonight? I can talk over the high cost of living with the butler, while the great brains are threshing the world's problems about in the drawing room. Or maybe I can take Alice out for a gander at the moon."

JONATHAN glanced at him sharply and almost ran down a stray dog.

"Alice always attends her father's salons," he said stiffly. "Alice appreciates intelligence as much as does her father."

"That's fine," Reggie said gloomily. The conviction was growing in him that he was in for a rather dismal time over the week end. He had intended to use this opportunity to convince Alice of his sterling virtues and irresistible charm. There would be little chance for that, he thought moodily, with a bunch of mighty intellects kicking around the Einstein theory and occupying all of Alice's attention and admiration. Even Jonathan probably understood Einstein's theory, he thought disgustedly.

He coughed. "I say, do you understand this theory of Einstein's that everyone's talking about?"

Jonathan smiled with smug superiority.

"Why, of course," he murmured. "The conclusions are actually elementary."

Reggie settled back and fell victim to a quiet despair.

"Who's going to be there tonight?" he finally asked.

"I doubt if you'd know any of them, even by name," Jonathan said. "Major Lionhead, the eminent military author is expected. Also, Dr. Adams, the famous Viennese surgeon will be present. I expect that he and I shall have much in common to discuss. And Jeremy

Taylor, the industrial airplane designer, is coming."

"I've heard of him," Reggie said hopefully.

"I'm not surprised," Jonathan said. "His name has been on the front page for several months. His designs have revolutionized the building of aircraft for the war effort."

"Quite a crowd," Reggie muttered.

"You can understand now," Jonathan said in a pained voice, "how awkward your arrival will be. Please don't consider me rude, but you must see that you just won't fit."

"I suppose so," Reggie sighed. "Maybe I can find one of the horses to talk to."

"I do wish you wouldn't persist in treating this matter so lightly," Jonathan said. "It's really a serious problem. I suggest that you remain silent for a while and I will apply my full attention to it."

"It's awfully good of you," Reggie said. "I won't say a word."

He was silent for several miles and he occupied the time thinking how delightful it would be to smack Dr. Jonathan Sloan squarely on the button.

After about an hour's ride through the beautiful brown-and-gold countryside Jonathan said:

"I'm making a stop at the Stateville asylum before we go on to the Montmacy's. Would you care to come in with me and look the place over?"

"Asylum? You mean a loony bin?"

Jonathan frowned in pained annoyance.

"The Stateville asylum is one of the most efficient institutions in the country for the treatment of mental disorders. I happen to be one of the consulting specialists on the staff. My stop will be brief. I have a few routine matters to check and then we'll be on our way again. You may wait in the car if you wish."

"Oh, no, I'll go along," Reggie said enthusiastically. "You know, I've never been in an insane asylum."

"Amazing," Jonathan said dryly. "Absolutely amazing."

IN ANOTHER few minutes they came to the Stateville asylum, a large brick building set back several hundred yards from the road. It was completely surrounded by a high wire fence and the only entrance was guarded by a husky chap in boots and breeches. This guard seemed to know Jonathan, for he swung the gate open and permitted him to drive up the graveled lane that led to the main building.

They got out of the car and walked up the steps to a wide porch and Jonathan rang the doorbell with the sharp assurance of the man who *isn't* selling brushes.

A high-domed individual in baggy dark clothes and spectacles opened the door. He beamed at Jonathan.

"Welcome, Dr. Sloan. How nice of you to drop by."

"Thank you. Dr. Livingstone, this is my friend, Reginald van Porter."

Reggie smiled blankly and shook his hand that Dr. Livingstone extended.

"How do you do," the doctor smiled, "I'm sure you will be very happy with us, Mr. van Porter. Here, you will find it restful and——"

"Mr. van Porter," Jonathan said hastily, "is not a client of mine, Dr. Livingstone."

"Oh," Dr. Livingstone said. He sounded disappointed. He looked appraisingly at Reggie and shook his head from side to side with a doubtful look in his eye. It was obvious that he wasn't convinced.

Reggie shifted uneasily. His collar suddenly seemed a little too tight.

"Perhaps I'd better wait in the car

after all," he said to Jonathan.

"Nonsense," Jonathan said crisply. "I've already locked the machine. Come along."

They followed Dr. Livingstone into the cool spacious depths of the asylum ante-room. A receptionist in a crisp white dress and nurse's cap was the only occupant of the room. She was a grimly efficient young lady and she regarded Reggie with a professional gleam in her eye.

Reggie was relieved when he passed from her presence into a well-furnished room, lined with books and dominated by a huge desk facing the window. In this room were several severe-looking men with long hair and eyeglasses. They were seated about in a circle and the object of their attention was a wispy-looking little man who stood abjectly in the center of the room and who, Reggie learned later, was under the illusion that he was a fried apple.

The doctors looked up when they entered and Jonathan made the introductions. Everyone nodded vaguely in Reggie's direction and promptly turned their attention again to the fried apple in their midst.

"An interesting case," Dr. Livingstone murmured to Jonathan. "I'd very much like to have your opinion of our tentative diagnosis."

"Which is what?" Jonathan said crisply.

"Dementia praecox," Dr. Livingstone said.

Dr. Jonathan Sloan tapped his teeth with a pencil, looked at a slip of paper Livingstone had handed him, then moodily regarded the patient, who, in turn, was moodily regarding the tip of his index finger.

"So," Dr. Sloan said kindly, "you think you're a fried apple, do you?"

"Yes. I've got cloves stuck in me, haven't I?" the patient said triumphantly.

Reggie regarded the little man with interest.

"I say, that's a shrewd point," he said, nudging Jonathan.

Jonathan turned and surveyed him with quiet annoyance, in which a shade of loathing was definitely mingled.

"Will you leave us for a while, Reginald?" he said sternly. "Your presence here will hardly be needed."

"Oh," Reggie said. Shrugging, he left the room. Let them keep their old fried apple, he thought dejectedly.

HE CLOSED the door behind him and turning around he found himself at the head of a long corridor, which was flanked on both sides by barred doors.

In a spirit of idle curiosity he strolled down the corridor peering casually into the cells as he passed. Several men, seated in the cells, glanced up from such mundane tasks as reading or writing, nodded to him and returned to their work.

Reggie was slightly puzzled. He had expected to find people fishing in buckets and wearing Napoleonic costumes, but such was apparently not the case. When he reached the end of the corridor he was about to turn when a quiet, cultivated voice said:

"Pardon me. Will you do me a favor, please?"

Reggie turned and saw a small, neatly dressed man with a pointed beard and steel-rimmed glasses regarding him with calm, twinkling blue eyes.

The man was standing at the door of his cell and there was a pleasant smile on his small, intelligent face.

"Why, certainly," Reggie said. "What is it?"

The man shifted his head and peered down the corridor in both directions. Then he smiled again at Reggie.

"My name is Professor Smythe," he said. "Possibly you have heard of me?"

"Nope," Reggie said, shaking his head, "can't say that I have."

The little man who called himself Professor Smythe sighed audibly, but he continued to regard Reggie with a friendly smile.

"It doesn't really matter," he murmured. "Although at one time I was quite well known. I did a great deal of work in chemical transformations."

"Is that so?" Reggie said.

"But that is neither here nor there," the little professor said, smiling. "I want you to do a favor for me."

"What is it?"

"I dropped something," the professor said. "I would appreciate it very much if you would pick it up for me."

"Dropped something?" Reggie regarded the little man blankly. "Can't you pick it up?"

"Well," Professor Smythe said with a tolerant smile, "if I could, I wouldn't be troubling you. I dropped it outside the door of my cell and I am unable to reach it. It's right at your feet."

Reggie glanced down at the floor and saw nothing. The smooth concrete was completely bare. He scratched his head and frowned at the professor.

"You're sure you dropped it here?"

"Yes, yes," the professor said eagerly. "Can't you see it? It's right at your feet."

Reggie looked down again, and again he saw nothing. Nothing, that is, except his own trousered legs and comfortably shod feet.

"I'm sorry to let you down like this," he said, "but I can't seem to see this thing you dropped. What is it?"

"A thinking cap," the professor said irritably. "I wish you'd look a bit more carefully. It's the only one I have."

"A thinking cap?" Reggie said in astonishment.

"Yes, my last one."

"That's tough," Reggie said. He looked down at the floor again and then back to the professor. "What does is look like?"

"Really, my dear boy," Professor Smythe said exasperatedly, "what would you *expect* a thinking cap to look like? It's small and fits the skull very neatly."

"What color is it?" Reggie asked.

THE little professor looked at him for an instant with a peculiar expression on his face and then he broke out laughing.

"What's so funny?" Reggie demanded.

"I'm sorry, really I am," the professor managed to say, between chuckles. "It's not your fault; I should have told you."

"Told me what?"

"About the thinking cap. It's invisible. That's why you can't see it."

"Oh, is that it?" Reggie nodded thoughtfully. "That would make a difference, at that. But how am I supposed to find it?"

"You'll just have to feel around for it, I'm afraid," the professor said.

"Just around for it, eh?"

"Yes. Get down on your knees and run your hands over the floor. It shouldn't be too much trouble. I feel terrible about putting you to all this bother, but it's really important that I find my thinking cap."

"Naturally," Reggie said. He wasn't quite sure whether to believe this little man or not. He seemed very rational and logical but still——

Feeling slightly silly he got down on all fours and began to feel about the floor with his hands. The little professor watched him anxiously.

"Are you sure this is where you dropped it?" Reggie asked.

"Of course," the Professor said peevishly.

Reggie continued his odd hunt, but slight doubts were beginning to steal into his mind.

"I simply must have it," the professor said worriedly. "With my thinking cap I am the most brilliant man in the world."

"Is that so?" Reggie was making an effort to be polite but it was coming hard.

"Without it," the professor went on moodily, "I am only the most brilliant man in North America. You see why it is so necessary that it be found."

This was an argument that Reggie could understand. He redoubled his efforts.

"Don't worry, Professor," he said cheerfully, "we'll find it."

He crawled about the corridor in ever widening circles, feeling every inch of the floor with his groping fingers. His head was lowered and he was applying all of his feverish concentration, when his outstretched hand collided with a very solid object.

"Found it!" he cried.

HE LOOKED up at the object he had felt, but it was not a cap. And it was not invisible. It was a very large, very visible shoe and, as he lifted his eyes with a feeling of sudden foolish guilt, he saw that the shoe connected to a trouser leg which led inevitably to a very large white-jacketed young man who was regarding him with polite suspicion.

"Uh . . . hello," Reggie said weakly.

"Hello," this young man said mildly. "What are you looking for?"

"A cap," Reggie said. He swallowed nervously as the realization came to him that he was in a somewhat compromising position. Explanations were obviously in order.

He gestured feebly toward the professor's cell.

"It's his hat," he said.

"His?" the guard repeated politely. He glanced toward the cell and slowly back to Reggie. With a slightly sick feeling Reggie followed his gaze and saw that the professor had left the door of the cell and was lying on a comfortable cot, apparently engrossed in a thick book.

"He wanted me to look for his cap," Reggie said. He tried to chuckle, but the result was a rather hideous giggle. "It's his thinking cap."

"Oh." The guard pursed his lips and nodded thoughtfully. He glanced solemnly down at the floor and shifted his gaze in a slow circle.

"It doesn't seem to be here, does it?" he said mildly.

"It's invisible." Reggie blurted.

"And that's why we can't see it," the guard said. He reached down and took Reggie's arm in a gentle but firm grip. "Supposing we come back and look for it later. Right now I think you'd better come along with me."

Reggie suddenly realized that the guard thought he was a loony.

"Now wait a minute," he said hoarsely. "I'm not crazy."

"Naturally not," the guard said. "Whoever said anything about that? Come along now."

There was obviously nothing else to do. Reggie started to rise his feet, but at that moment his hand brushed against a very light object on the floor. He looked down quickly but saw nothing. His hand closed slowly over a soft filmy object which felt surprisingly like a skull cap.

"I've found it!" he shouted.

"Come on now," the guard said, and there was a hint of grimness in his voice. He lifted Reggie none too gently to his feet.

But Reggie still held the light, invisible cap in his hand. At least he presumed it was a cap. For that was what the professor had said, and the most brilliant man in the world wouldn't likely be wrong. Thus reasoned Reggie. And he knew it was invisible, for the simple reason that he couldn't see it. That conclusion was simple.

The guard was propelling him down the corridor.

"Now wait a minute," Reggie said frantically. "I've got to give the professor his cap."

"You can do that later," the guard said.

REGGIE looked at the barrel chest and wide shoulders of the guard and, with a sigh, conceded the point. He slipped the cap on his head and allowed the guard to lead him to the door at the end of the corridor and into the presence of Dr. Livingstone, Dr. Jonathan Sloan and their associates.

Their entrance created quite a stir.

"This one," the guard said, jerking a thumb at Reggie, "got out. Do you want to talk to him before I take him back to his cell?"

Dr. Livingstone glanced at Jonathan with raised eyebrows. His expression clearly indicated that his first impression of Reggie had been right.

Jonathan's expression was a mixture of embarrassment, anger and disgust.

"This young man is not an inmate," he said to the guard. With a cold look at Reggie, he added, "but in my professional opinion he should be."

"Not an inmate!" the guard said incredulously. He looked at Reggie and shook his head. "Somebody's screwy then and it isn't me."

"You may go now," Dr. Livingstone said firmly.

The guard looked at Reggie again, shook his head and shrugged. He left, clearly unconvinced in regard to Reggie's mental status.

Fortunately, Jonathan said coldly, when the guard had gone, "We are leaving now, Reggie. If we stayed longer I should probably have difficulty in getting you out."

He picked up his hat angrily.

"Come along," he snapped, striding toward the door.

Reggie followed him moodily. He was thinking what a choice story this would make when retold by Jonathan for Alice's benefit.

Dr. Livingstone followed Jonathan to the door of his office.

"Then you agree with me, Dr. Sloan," he said, "that our patient is suffering from dementia praecox?"

"Absolutely!" Jonathan spoke crisply. "That is my unqualified opinion."

Reggie glanced at the little man who thought he was a fried apple. "So that's what wrong with him, eh?"

"That is our opinion," Jonathan said stiffly. "What is yours?" he added, as a sarcastic afterthought.

Reggie swallowed in embarrassment.

"Why, gosh," he said, "I don't——"

He stopped speaking as something suddenly tinkled sharply in his skull. It was the darndest sensation! As if a tiny hammer had tapped against the inside of his head.

"Your diagnosis is incorrect," he said firmly. He was startled by the resonant authoritative tone of his voice, but he was more startled by the fact he was advancing an opinion at all. "It is not, as you falsely presume, dementia praecox; rather the patient's attitude is an acute manifestation of schizophrenia. If you will observe the following symptoms and keep in mind what Hegel wrote on this subject, I will substantiate my diagnosis to your complete approval."

REGGIE listened in growing disbelief to the words that were flowing from his mouth. He knew nothing of psychology and psychiatry, yet he was glibly expounding the most abstruse and learned tenets of those sciences as if he'd studied them since birth. He rattled on, completely unconscious of what he was saying, but piling conclusion on conclusion while the doctors listened in amazement and admiration that grew with each sentence he uttered.

Reggie reached his climax. With brilliant forensic ability he proved point after point of his premise and finally glided into his peroration, concluding with a few pithy remarks about the role of psychiatric study in the planning of a world peace.

With that he paused for breath.

Dr. Livingstone removed his eyeglasses solemnly. He turned to his colleagues. There was a stunned look on his face.

"I am convinced," he said slowly, his voice quivering with emotion, "that we have been wrong. Absolutely wrong! Our young friend has shown us, beyond the slightest possibility of doubt, that our diagnosis was incorrect."

There was a murmur of agreement from the assembled savants.

Jonathan was staring at Reggie in speechless anger.

"Now just a minute," he finally blurted. "I happen to know that this young nit-wit knows nothing about psychology."

"Dr. Sloan!" Dr. Livingstone spoke sternly. "I can't imagine what prompts you to make such a ridiculous accusation. If you have ears you must know better." He turned impressively and placed his hand on Reggie's shoulder. "I, for one, admit to being in the presence of a master. My boy, where did you take your degree?"

Reggie blinked dazedly. The peculiar sensation that had followed the tinkling sound in his head was fading. He put his hand slowly to his head and his fingers touched a light object resting on the back of his skull.

The thinking cap!

Could that have accounted for this brilliant demonstration?

"Oh, let's go," Jonathan said irritably. "We're late already."

Dr. Livingstone followed Reggie to the porch, practically hanging on his arm.

"You will drop in again, won't you?" he pleaded. "I can't tell you much as I would like to discuss the science of psychology with you."

"Why, sure," Reggie said awkwardly. "That ought to be great sport."

He disengaged himself from the doctor's reverent clutch and climbed into the car alongside Jonathan.

As they drove out the gate of the asylum, Jonathan cleared his throat

"Where did you pick up that mumbo-jumbo about psychology?" he demanded.

Reggie shook his head wonderingly. "I wish I knew," he said.

CHAPTER II

THE drive to the Montmacy estate was completed in stony silence. Jonathan wore an uneasy frown on his severe features and he occasionally glanced at Reggie with a peculiar look in his eye.

Reggie, for one of the few times in his life, was busy with his own thoughts. The baffling incident at the asylum was occupying all his attention. There was no explanation for the suddenly acquired erudition that had enabled him to astound the doctors with his knowledge of the hair-splitting terms and thoughts of modern psychology. He

hadn't the slightest idea how the thing had happened.

There was, however, the matter of the thinking cap. He put his hand cautiously to his head to assure himself that it was still in place. It was.

Nothing made any particular sense so he decided to try and forget the whole business. This was a typical reaction. With a shrug he consigned the incident to the darkest oblivion.

They reached the Montmacy home half an hour later. It was a low rambling structure, buttressed with stone gables, and it stood solidly against the red glow of the afternoon sun. Several acres of wooded fields surrounded the house, and the winding drive that led to the wide front porch twisted through natural archways formed by stately sycamores.

Alice met them on the porch. She greeted Jonathan warmly, but when she turned to Reggie there was a shocked expression on her face.

"Reggie!" she cried. "I invited you down tomorrow."

"I've been trying to make him realize how awkward this will be," Jonathan said sternly.

"Can't I just sleep in the stable tonight?" Reggie said.

"Of course not," Alice said. She was a very pretty girl with dark hair and deep, clear blue eyes. Now there was a worried little frown on her face. "You know how Father is," she said. "He's simply furious if anyone disturbs his Saturday night salons."

"Why can't I just lurk about the pantry until it's all over?" Reggie suggested hopefully.

"That's impossible," Alice said. "Daddy insists that all the guests participate. I just have a feeling this is going to be terrible." She turned impulsively to Joanthan and put her hand on his arm. "I know I can count on you, Jonathan."

"Thank you," he said. He obviously was deeply moved.

"You'll have to see that everything goes smoothly."

"You may rely on me, Alice."

Reggie was beginning to feel left out of things.

"I'll help too," he said.

"Oh, Reggie," Alice said helplessly. "I don't know what I'll do with you." She adjusted her skirt nervously. "We might as well go in now. The guests are with Father in the library."

Reggie meekly followed Alice and Jonathan into the big home, down a long corridor and into Professor Thaddeus Montmacy's high-ceilinged, book-lined library.

THE professor himself came forward to meet them. He was a small, well-preserved man of about sixty. His hair was white, but there was no suggestion of age in his sharp features and keen, piercing eyes. Professor Montmacy was practically a national institution. His discoveries in sociology, economics, physics, chemistry and a dozen other fields were prolific bequests to the betterment of the world. Universities vied with one another to heap honors on his well-shaped head, and Washington kept him in constant service as an unofficial adviser to half a dozen important departments.

In spite of these many wonderful characteristics, Professor Montmacy was human enough to possess an unbridled temper, a razor-sharp tongue, and the firm belief that he was the only person in the world who appreciated what he had done for mankind.

He greeted Jonathan warmly.

"Glad to have you down, my boy." His cordial tone admitted Jonathan to the distinguished company present and welcomed him as a guest at the same

time.

He turned to Reggie and the warm light in his eye chilled.

"You!" he said.

"Hiya, Prof," Reggie said, hoping to establish a warm comradely relationship. "How's the big brain these days?"

Professor Montmacy knew Reggie, which was an unfortunate thing for Reggie. He shared the majority opinion of Reggie, which unfortunately wasn't high.

"I am well, thank you," he said.

The professor then introduced Jonathan to the others present. He also introduced Reggie, not because he wanted to, but because there were certain canons of polite behavior which he couldn't ignore.

Reggie found himself shaking hands with Major Lionhead, the military author, a tall, beetle-browed man with huge brown eyes and a bushy beard. Later he met Dr. Adams, the Viennese surgeon, who was a stocky chap with ribboned eyeglasses and a neat mustache which constituted the only hair on his head. His skull was a bald, gleaming dome about the shape of a billiard ball.

"I thought I shot you into a side pocket last night," Reggie said, chuckling. He nudged the doctor in the ribs. "Get it?"

Doctor Adams looked at him distastefully.

"I am afraid, sir, that I do," he said, moving away.

Reggie realized too late that the doctor was probably very sensitive about his baldness. He resolved to keep his mouth tightly shut from that point on.

The last man he met was Jeremy Taylor, the industrial airplane designer. Mr. Taylor was a pale, tired-looking man in his late fifties who looked as if twenty hours' sleep would set him on his feet again. He had a cigarette burning in his thin fingers, from which he took quick, nervous pulls. He was an intelligent-looking man, but a very tired one, in Reggie's opinion.

He acknowledged the introduction without any particular enthusiasm and retired to a corner of the room to light another cigarette.

This maneuver left Reggie stranded in the middle of the room directly in the cross channel of a highly erudite conversation which the professor was carrying on with Major Lionhead and Jonathan.

The subject under discussion seemed to be the relative merits of the military methods of Frederick the Great and Napoleon.

"Frederick the Great," Major Lionhead stated emphatically, "was the greatest tactical commander of all time. There has never been anything yet developed as effective as his oblique attack in turning the right or left wing of an opposing force."

AN IMPRESSIVE silence followed this remark and Major Lionhead moved his gaze slowly about the room as if daring anyone to advance a contradiction.

Professor Montmacy frowned thoughtfully.

"Generalizations are always unreliable," he said, in his thin, precise voice. "I think you will find, if you consult the record, that Frederick's method of attack failed when it was put to the test in opposition to Napoleon."

"I doubt if you can substantiate that statement," Major Lionhead said, smiling gravely.

"I don't happen to have the exact facts at my finger tips," Professor Montmacy said, "but I feel reasonably certain that I am correct. I am not in the habit of being wrong, you know."

He turned to Jonathan.

"Perhaps you can help, my boy. I forget the exact time and place, but I'm certain there was a battle in which the tactics of Frederick the Great were completely nullified by Napoleon."

"I'm sorry, sir," Jonathan said awkwardly; "but I'm inclined to agree with the major."

"Bah!" snapped the professor.

Major Lionhead smiled slowly, revealing an amazing mouthful of gold-capped teeth. He seemed quite pleased with his victory over the professor. His eye happened to meet Reggie's.

"Perhaps your memory is better than my kind host's," he said graciously.

"Me?" Reggie said blankly.

"Oh, for heaven's sake," the professor said irritably, "let's not descend to the ridiculous. He wouldn't know the difference between a Thompson machine gun and a bow and arrow."

"I think you're being unfair to the young man," Major Lionhead said expansively. He patted Reggie on the shoulder with patronizing kindness. "What is your opinion of this interesting point? Do you agree with me or with Professor Montmacy?"

"I agree emphatically with the professor," Reggie said flatly.

He heard the words issuing from his mouth in a sort of trance. They had simply popped out of their own volition. He was the most surprised person in the room; and that was saying a lot. All were regarding him with expressions that ranged from surprise to sheer amazement.

Major Lionhead studied him with speculative eyes. He was obviously weighing the mettle of this new opponent, and from the expression of happy anticipation that slowly spread over his face, it was apparent that he did not expect any serious trouble.

"So?" he said slowly. "You do not agree with me? Perhaps you would be kind enough to explain your position."

REGGIE felt a curious tinkling sound in his head. The tiny hammer was tapping again at the inside of his skull. He had experienced the same sensation at the asylum when he had been questioned about psychology.

Something completely alien to his own intelligence seemed to take command of his mind; the vocal cords in his throat were suddenly acting on their own.

"You are completely and inexcusably wrong, Major Lionhead," he heard himself saying with cold authority. "At the battle of Austerlitz, the Czar, Alexander, attempted an oblique attack patterned exactly after the plans of Frederick the Great. Napoleon outmaneuvered the forces of the Czar, launched a counter frontal attack and, if you will recall your elementary military history, completely smashed the Czar's center and scored the most brilliant and decisive victor of his entire career."

Reggie paused and glanced at the major with a quiet smile on his lips.

"That battle, as you may recall, was fought on the second of October, eighteen hundred and five, and it is considered by military historians the most perfect land battle ever executed. Is there anything else needed, Major, to establish my point?"

Major Lionhead's discomfiture was apparent as he stroked his beard and frowned at the floor.

"I had forgotten Austerlitz," he muttered. "You were right, Professor. I am forced to admit that now."

"Of course I was right," the professor said. He regarded Reggie with reluctant admiration. "You seem to have a fair grasp of military history.

I'll confess you surprised me."

Reggie smiled feebly and said nothing. He had surprised himself. In fact, he had astounded, amazed and completely shocked himself.

Major Lionhead coughed himself back into the conversation.

"Tell me, have you read von Clauswitz on infantry maneuvers?" he asked Reggie.

The bell tinkled again in Reggie's head and the hammer started tapping.

"Von Clauswitz? Naturally. A good man in a dull sort of way. Most of his conclusions have been disproven in the last twenty years, but I dare say he is still interesting to students."

The words snapped out with an assumption of arbitrary authority that was devastating. Major Lionhead stroked his beard and retired to a corner of the room to lick his wounds.

Reggie wondered what the devil was happening to him. Never in his life had he read a book of military history. Nothing could have been more out of character; but here he was spouting a stream of facts and theory that knocked an eminent authority like Major Lionhead gasping on the ropes.

It was all damned queer!

He couldn't figure it out at all. But from the admiring expression on Alice's face he realized that he wasn't hurting himself one bit in that particular quarter.

She crossed the room to his side and took his arm impulsively.

"Why, you're wonderful, Reggie!" she said. "I had no idea that you were such a student."

Reggie smiled feebly. "Didn't you?"

Jonathan regarded him with distinct annoyance.

"Some people make a habit of memorizing a few obscure facts and parading them as evidence of deep intelligence," he said sulkily.

"That isn't fair, Jonathan," Alice said. There was a spot of color in her cheeks as she faced him directly. "Reggie didn't parade his information. He waited until he was asked for an opinion before he said a word."

"That's right," her father said. "Very becoming modesty, I must say."

REGGIE was thinking of that very angle of his suddenly and mysteriously acquired erudition. The information seemed to be lying dormant in his brain and he, himself, was completely unaware of its existence; but when a question was asked him, the little bell started tinkling, and out popped the answer, complete, authoritative and brilliant.

That was fine, he thought, as long as someone asked him the questions. Without that stimulus his brain was as blank as it had been the previous twenty-six years of his life. And that was pretty darn blank.

The only solution he could figure out for the baffling problem was that the invisible thinking cap which he had acquired at the asylum was responsible for his new powers. And what an idea that was!

A person equipped with a more orthodox attitude than Reggie would quickly have relegated such a theory to oblivion. But Reggie was strangely enchanted with it. A thinking cap seemed logical enough to him. After all, he had believed in Santa Claus until he was seventeen years old.

He put his hand tentatively to his head and felt the soft, flimsy texture of the cap. It was invisible; but it was definitely there. And it was definitely transforming him into a brilliant sort of chap.

This thought caused him to brighten. Why, everything was wonderful! With

the aid of this invisible bonnet he would cover himself with glory and earn Gloria's undying respect and admiration.

Gloria was still holding his arm, and he smiled into her eyes.

"You have such a stimulating mind," Gloria said with enraptured surprise. "I'd never noticed that before. I simply must have a nice long talk with you. Would you like to take a ride before dinner?"

"Tallyho to the hounds, and all that?" Reggie asked. "Sounds splendid."

"Now just a minute," Professor Montmacy said to his daughter, "I don't want you to monopolize Reginald completely. I want to talk to him. He has—er—unsuspected depths.

"Young man," he said, turning to Reggie, "I'll confess that I was slightly worried when I saw you. I was afraid you wouldn't fit in, so to speak, at my salon this evening. But I realize now that my fears were unjustified. I shall be honored if you take part in the discussion tonight at eight sharp, here in the library."

"Professor Montmacy," Reggie said solemnly, "I shall be honored."

Gloria held his arm possessively.

"Come on, Reggie, we'll just have time to change and ride before dinner."

"Righto," said Reggie.

In a corner, Jonathan sulked moodily and Major Lionhead was still gnawing his beard in annoyance as Reggie and Gloria left the room.

Reggie knew then how Alexander must have felt.

CHAPTER III

IN HIS room overlooking the stately Montmacy gardens, Reggie changed quickly into trig riding clothes. His feeling of ebullient elation expressed itself in an off-key tenor that made up in enthusiasm what it lacked in quality and pitch.

When he was ready to leave he thought of the thinking cap. For a moment he thought of taking it with him, but a certain pride prompted him to leave it behind. He would need it chewing the intellectual fat with the professor, but he felt he could out-think a horse without any extra mental aids.

He met Gloria in the stable, and she looked lovely and boyish in smooth jodphurs and a pert derby that fitted her small dark head perfectly.

"You look just like Lady Godiva," he said gallantly.

"Reggie!" Gloria cried. "What do you mean?"

Reggie remembered too late that Lady Godiva, while an excellent horsewoman, had also been completely ungilded for her epic ride. For years he had been telling girls on horseback that they looked like Godiva, and for years he had been puzzled by the peculiar reaction to what he had meant as a gracious compliment. He realized he had made a mistake in doffing the thinking cap.

"Just a figure of speech, y'know," he said lamely. "Let's hit the old cinder path, shall we?"

He helped Gloria to mount, then climbed aboard his own horse. They followed the winding, elm-sheltered path through the Montmacy domain until they reached the wider road that branched out into the wooded sections that flanked the estate.

They were back in an hour and Reggie knew that he had made definite strides. When they had rested their mounts at the half-way mark, there had been something soulful in Gloria's eyes that turned his insides into a frothy custard. She was undoubtedly impressed with his noble mastery of

the steed and his quiet air of confident authority. There had been a slightly embarrassing moment when his saddle slipped and he had fallen into the road, but his recovery had been deft.

"That was lovely," she said, as they dismounted.

"Ripping," Reggie said heartily.

This was a rather accurate choice of word, for his breeches chose that moment to snag on the pommel and lend a loud sound effect to his adjective.

In some confusion, Reggie retreated to the house.

Gloria smiled at him.

"Hurry and dress," she called. "Dinner is at six, and Daddy doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"Righto," Reggie cried.

He retired to his room feeling that he had done an excellent afternoon's work. Now if he could just further establish himself in Gloria's graces at the big brain bust tonight, why everything would be perfect.

He showered, shaved and dressed, feeling quite complacently pleased with himself and his prospects. He combed his hair carefully and then collected his watch, change and keys from the bureau, dropped them into his pockets and started for the door.

Half way there, he paused, smiling. There was just one thing he'd forgotten and that was the extremely essential thinking cap. In the present circumstances he would as soon have gone down without his pants as without that bit of apparel.

He went back and ran his hands slowly over the top of the bureau, for that was where he remembered leaving the thinking cap. But it was not there.

"Heh, heh," Reggie laughed hollowly.

A damp sweat broke out on his forehead and his knees suddenly felt unequal to the task of holding him erect. He sagged against the dresser and took a deep breath to steady himself.

"Brace yourself, old boy," he said to his pale image in the mirror.

When his nervous tremors had passed he made a frantically thorough search of the room, under the bed, through the closet, into the drawers, but the results were nil.

There was no trace of the thinking cap in the room.

Reggie sat numbly on the edges of the bed and let the slow horror of the situation seep into his soul.

Dinner was in another few minutes. Immediately after came the professor's salon. He was expected to be present; he was expected to participate in the great battle of brains. And without the aid of the thinking cap he would be proven for all time as a complete imbecile and moron.

A pretty mess!

For several seconds he nibbled his fingernails nervously; then some of his cheerful confidence returned. After all, he was no worse off than before he had the thinking cap; and someone else was much better off, so it all balanced up.

He continued to sit for another few seconds gazing moodily at the floor and then he stood up slowly and a great light broke over the blackness of his soul.

Someone was better off for having the thinking cap! Obviously! But how had that "someone" gotten it? That was the question he asked himself triumphantly.

And there was only one answer.

Someone had stolen the thinking cap while he had been out riding with Gloria. Someone had somehow learned of its existence and had peached the jolly thing.

That was it!

Reggie began pacing nervously, but there was a charged air of purpose in

his excitement now. He wasn't the type to take a thing like this lying down. If someone had stolen his thinking cap that party was in for trouble.

He ran over the list of suspects and, like Abou ben Adhem, Johnathan's name led all the rest.

"The snake!" thought Reggie bitterly.

But he couldn't discard others altogether. How about Taylor, the industrial designer? Nervous, shifty type, probably a bedroom drinker. Would bear watching.

Major Lionhead? Maybe. Although bearded men were usually reliable and solid. Look at the Smith brothers.

Dr. Adams, the Viennese surgeon? Possibly. No definite proof, but something about the man led Reggie to suspect that he would lift not only a thinking cap but any silver that might be lying around loose.

The professor of course was eliminated. Why would *he* need a thinking cap? Coals to Newcastle.

REGGIE left his room purposefully. He had only a minute or so before dinner and he meant to make it count. The door of the next room was slightly ajar and, after a cautious knock, he slipped inside.

This was Jeremy Taylor's room. Reggie looked around and scratched his head. Assuming Taylor was the guilty party, where would he hide a thinking cap? Of course he might be wearing the thing but he'd have to wait until he saw Taylor to investigate that angle.

He ran quickly over the bureau and then through the drawers. In the second drawer there was a sheaf of papers which held his interest for a moment. They were covered with mathematical symbols and intricate geometrical figures. The design seemed to be that of a fuel pump, but Reggie thought it probably wasn't. It didn't look like any fuel pump *he* had ever seen.

He was just closing the drawer when he heard the door of the room open slowly.

He looked over his shoulder and saw that Dr. Adams, the eminent surgeon, was standing in the doorway, regarding him with a slightly amused expression.

The doctor's monocle glinted with what seemed to be an accusing glare; and his gleaming bald dome was righteousness itself. He rubbed his small pointed beard reflectively and stepped a few feet into the room.

"Darn that collar button," Reggie said, with a weak laugh. "Always losing it here or there." He waved his hand about the room. "Just can't find it anywhere."

Dr. Adams frowned.

"Was it your collar button, may I ask?"

"Why, sure."

"Then let me suggest," Dr. Adams said, "that you might have better luck looking for it in *your* room instead of Mr. Taylor's."

He bowed solemnly, turned and left the room.

Reggie followed him, shortly. There was absolutely no point in going about the search this way. Added to the difficulties of finding an invisible object in a large room was the fact that someone was liable to come stumbling in at any time, just as had Dr. Adams. He would have to use strategy. While he was drifting down the hallway like the ghost of Hamlet, the elder, he ran into Gloria.

"I've been looking for you," she said. "We're having a drink before dinner. Father sent me to get you." She took his arm and smiled at him. "He's taken a definite change of attitude toward you. He says you surprise him

with your brilliance and modesty. Only *a moment ago he was saying that he* can hardly wait to hear you tonight in the discussion after dinner."

"Heh, heh." Reggie's laugh had all the jollity of a man who has been saved from a gas chamber in order to be strapped into an electric chair.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE library, bolstered by a few drinks, Reggie remembered his chief problem, which was the finding of his thinking cap.

Jonathan was standing by the fireplace, looking solid, substantial and well groomed. His dark hair was combed carefully and lay close to his well-rounded skull. He looked above the common failings.

No one, Reggie thought gloomily, would ever conceive of Jonathan doing anything small or petty. He would never get drunk; he would never go to a stag party. Of course, he wouldn't ever be invited to a stag party, but that wasn't the point.

Looking at him, solid, worthwhile, upright, it seemed hard to envision him sneaking in to steal a thinking cap from a chap's room.

Still, Reggie was too desperate to rely completely on appearances. He walked to Jonathan's side and slapped him on the shoulder.

"What ho!" he cried

He reached out suddenly and with a smile of good-fellowship on his face tousled Jonathan's neatly combed hair quite thoroughly.

Jonathan stiffened and looked at him in disgust.

"Really," he said frigidly. "I can't say that I share your enthusiasm for horseplay." He set his drink on the mantel and smoothed his hair with his hands and turned a wounded back to Reggie.

Reggie sighed and shrugged. At least Jonathan wasn't wearing the thinking cap now.

Several minutes passed and Reggie was beginning to feel completely miserable. He was a lamb being led to an intellectual slaughter and there was nothing he could do about it.

He glanced moodily about the room. In a corner, Jeremy Taylor and the professor were discussing hydraulic pressures with the delight of small boys arguing baseball; before the fire, Jonathan, Gloria and Major Lionhead were chuckling merrily over a passage from Spinoza.

He was glad when the butler announced dinner. If he couldn't think, he could at least eat. After all, one man's as good as another with a roast beef.

As they filed in to dinner Dr. Adams joined them, and Jeremy Taylor excused himself for a moment and went back upstairs.

They were taking their seats when Jeremy Taylor burst back into the room. His lean face was pale; his hands were trembling violently.

"Professor Montmacy I have a serious charge to make against some member of this party," he said tersely. "Plans, important government plans concerning airplane engines, have been taken from my room. I brought them down here for study."

He glanced slowly from face to face about the table.

"I have already notified the F.B.I. Until they arrive I must insist that no one leave the house."

EVERYONE began to talk at once when Taylor stopped. The professor raised a hand to quiet the noise.

"We will do precisely what Mr. Taylor wishes," he said in his clipped voice.

"I sincerely hope that this will turn out to be some misunderstanding. It grieves me to think that anyone would take advantage of my hospitality for the purpose of betraying this country. I—"

"Pardon me for interrupting," Dr. Adams said, "but I think I might be able to cast a light on the disappearance of Mr. Taylor's important papers."

"Speak up, man," Taylor snapped. "What do you know about this thing?"

"Simply this," Dr. Adams said. "When I was going to my room about half an hour ago, I passed your room and noticed that the door was open. I looked in to see if you were there. You were not. But the room was not empty." He paused and stroked his short silken beard slowly. "It pains me to say that Reginald van Porter was standing in front of your bureau in the act of searching the drawers."

Dr. Adams shrugged expressively.

"Possibly the young man has an explanation for his conduct. I, for one, hope so. I only mentioned this because of the gravity of Mr. Taylor's loss."

A silence followed Dr. Adams' statement. It was a deafeningly loud silence, that pressed down on the table with oppressive weight.

Reggie became conscious that he was the center of attention. Everyone at the table was regarding him to the exclusion of all else. Jonathan wore a smug, "I told you so" look; Major Lionhead was grave; Professor Montmacy was stern; Gloria looked at him with wide, tear-filled eyes.

"Do you have any explanation, Mr. van Porter?" Taylor asked, his voice as cold as the Russian steppes.

"Well," Reggie wiggled uncomfortably, "I——"

"What were you looking for in my dresser?" Taylor asked.

"A cuff button," Reggie said. He was glad he thought of that. Wouldn't do to change his story now. Stick to it. "Cuff button," he repeated firmly.

"I see," Taylor said significantly. He glanced at Professor Montmacy. "I think it is our duty to search Mr. van Porter's rooms. It is not my wish to appear arbitrary or high-handed, but it is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of those missing designs."

Professor Montmacy nodded. He seemed very tired.

"Very well. Go ahead."

Taylor nodded to Major Lionhead and Dr. Adams.

"Will you gentlemen assist me, please?"

When the three men had left the room, the professor shoved back his chair and stood up.

"Excuse me, please," he said dryly. "I'll be in the library if I'm needed."

"Isn't anyone going to eat?" Reggie asked.

"I'm afraid my appetite is gone," Gloria said. She smiled faintly. "I suppose I'll feel better when Mr. Taylor comes back and tells us that they found nothing in your room."

"Why, of course you will," Reggie said.

"I hope you will," Jonathan said, in a voice that indicated what a lost hope that really was.

Reggie was eating his shrimp cocktail with considerable relish when Jeremy Taylor returned, followed closely by the major and Dr. Adams. Taylor carried a sheaf of papers in his hands. His face was white and set.

Reggie stopped chewing on his shrimp. There was a large hollow in the region of his stomach. He had a feeling in his bones that the sky was about to fall in on him.

And with Taylor's first words it did.

"We found this in your valise," he said evenly. "The evidence is con-

clusive. You will be placed in custody, van Porter, when the F.B.I. agents arrive."

Reggie resumed chewing his shrimp. There was no point in going to pieces, he reasoned.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Reggie finished his shrimp cocktail he was led into the library and left in the center of the room like a pariah. Gloria was crying in a corner and Jonathan was comforting her. The professor was bitterly silent and stony-faced.

Major Lionhead stood close by as if he were expecting Reggie to make a break for it. Dr. Adams was equally zealous on the opposite side. Taylor was pacing the floor and glancing nervously at his watch.

"Really," Reggie said for about the fifth time, "this is sheer nonsense. I haven't the foggiest idea how those papers got into my valise."

"Perhaps the F.B.I. will refresh your memory," Taylor said.

Reggie lapsed into another moody silence. He started to do a little thinking. Since he hadn't taken the papers, it stood to reason that someone else—someone present right now—had taken them. That seemed simplicity itself but no one else could apparently understand it.

He frowned and shook his head. There seemed to be quite an epidemic of kleptomania rampant on the Montmacy estate. First, the thinking cap; now this. He wondered if there could be any connection between the two thefts.

And with that thought a little cog in his head slipped into place and he realized that the thinking cap hadn't been stolen at all. No! He had taken it off in the bathroom to comb his hair. And he had hung it on the towel rack beside the shower. That's where it was right this minute. He felt like apologizing to all the people he had suspected.

"Oh, I say," he said cheerfully, "this is really wonderful."

"I'm glad you're amused," the professor snarled.

"I didn't mean about his," Reggie said. "I meant about the other."

"What other?"

"Oh, that's right, you don't know, do you?" Reggie said. He realized that none of these people knew of the thinking cap. He had told no one about it.

"I wish you would stop babbling," the professor said.

"Righto," Reggie said.

Another thought had popped into his head. If he could get his thinking cap back into action it might help him clear up this mess he was in. As things looked, the broad gates of Alcatraz were yawning at him; but with a little help from the thinking cap that might be avoided.

Up to that point his reasoning was sound and everything was simplicity itself. But how to get the thinking cap? That would involve leaving the room and, judging from the grim expressions on the faces of Major Lionhead and Dr. Adams, such an action would not be easy.

He glanced nervously at Dr. Adams and noticed the way the light gleamed on the good doctor's shining pate. And he remembered the doctor's sensitivity on this subject.

"Hey, baldy," he said to the doctor. "Got a match?"

He wasn't sure what he had in mind, but if he could distract the doctor's attention. . . .

Dr. Adams glared at him in silence and then turned his back. "I find your comments vulgar," he said.

REGGIE knew he would never have a better chance. Major Lionhead was staring stonily ahead and the doctor's back was turned. With a swift, slippery motion Reggie dodged around the doctor and legged it for the arched doorway that led to the second floor stairs. For a second the speed of his maneuver caught everyone in the room off guard, and he reached the bottom of the steps before he heard the outraged bellow of Major Lionhead and the high angry shout of Jeremy Taylor.

"Come back here!" the professor screamed.

Reggie took a split-second for a glance over his shoulder. All the men in the room were charging toward the door with business-like expressions on their faces. Jonathan was in the lead, and over his shoulder Reggie caught a glimpse of Gloria's white, frightened face.

That was all the time he allowed himself for reconnaisance.

With a prayer to the gods of the chase he streaked up the stairs, taking them three at a time. Reaching the corridor he got into high gear and sprinted past a startled maid, down the long dark hall to his room. He slammed and locked the door behind him and dove for the bathroom.

His heart was pounding like a riveting machine. He felt like a fox, and not a particularly smart fox, at that. As he snapped on the light he heard a heavy pounding against the door of the room. He swung his eyes desperately around the room. He was sure he had left the thinking cap in here, but supposing he had been wrong? The very thought brought a rash of uncomfortable perspiration to his forehead.

He moved his trembling hands swiftly over the wash-bowl and found nothing. The sound of the assault on the outside door was growing; a splintering crash indicated that his pursuers meant business.

Panting like a trapped hare Reggie swung around with his back to the wash-bowl and prayed for inspiration. And then he remembered the hook beside the shower. That was where he had left it.

He lunged for the hook and almost fainted with sheer relief when he felt the soft, velvety texture of the thinking cap under his fingers.

As he slipped it on, the bedroom door crashed inward and Jonathan stumbled into the room, followed closely by the stocky figure of Major Lionhead.

"Halt!" the major thundered. "We've got you cornered."

"Like a rat," Jonathan added with obvious relish.

Jeremy Taylor entered the room.

"Take him downstairs," he ordered. "I don't think we need any more evidence. This attempted break of his is conclusive proof that he's guilty."

Reggie surveyed them all with lordly condescension. With his thinking cap firmly in place, he felt a surge of confidence and power that enabled him to rise above the incriminating evidence that was arrayed against him.

"By all means," he said, "let us go downstairs. This farce has been carried just about far enough."

CHAPTER VI

IN THE library Reggie was seated in a chair and the five men present surrounded him in a grim circle. There was no chance of escape this time. In the corner, Alice cried softly.

"The F.B.I. will be here shortly," Taylor said.

"I shall welcome their arrival," Reggie said haughtily. "They are men of intelligence and vision. When they

hear my story they will instantly understand how ridiculous your accusations are."

"Just what is your story?" Jonathan asked pointedly.

That stumped Reggie. He didn't have any story. But he was thinking hard and several interesing facts were tumbling around in his mind.

For one thing, when Dr. Adams had surprised him in Taylor's room, what had been the doctor's business in that room? And just before dinner everyone had been in the library except Dr. Adams. He had joined them as they were going in. Shortly after, Taylor had gone up to his room and discovered the loss of his documents.

"Hmmmmn," Reggie said thoughtfully.

But the faint suspicion that was buzzing in his head lacked the confirmation of facts. If Adams had stolen the plans, why had they turned up in his bedroom? Why hadn't Adams kept them? Why bother stealing them in the first place if he had no use for them?

Reggie squinted thoughtfully at the doctor. There was nothing in that frank, bearded face to arouse suspicion. The doctor looked incredibly respectable and upright. He looked, Reggie thought, as Jonathan would look in another twenty-five years. That thought made him sit up abruptly. The two were certainly cast in the same mold. And Jonathan was certainly a little stinker now! Give him another twenty-five years to develop and it wasn't hard to imagine him stealing plans from a man's bedroom. The connection was too logical and obvious to miss.

"Dr. Adams," Reggie said firmly. "What was your purpose in entering Mr. Taylor's room?"

"What?" Adams said blankly. He seemed surprised at the question. His round bald pate flushed a slow red. "I hope you are not implying——"

"I am simply asking a question," Reggie said.

Dr. Adams drew himself to his full height.

"You are hardly in any position to be asking questions," he sneered. "What is needed from you is answers, not questions."

"What were you doing in my room?" Taylor asked. His lined face was suddenly alert, but his voice was just politely curious.

"Why," Adams said, laughing slightly, "I simply got mixed-up in the darkness and blundered into the wrong room." He glanced around at the circle of faces and the smile left his face. "I do not find this questioning amusing, gentlemen. We have our self-convicted culprit and I fail to see what end will be served by humiliating me."

"You haven't been searched, have you, Doctor?" Reggie asked.

Adams glared at him. "Are you out of your mind? What have I to conceal? The designs for the fuel pump have been recovered. They were in your room, if you've forgotten."

"No, I haven't forgotten," Reggie said. "But one thing interests me."

"And what is that?"

"How did you know that the designs were for a fuel pump?"

THERE was a strange silence in the room and all eyes were focused on Dr. Adams. He was regarding Reggie with cold, unsmiling eyes.

"Someone must have mentioned it within my hearing," he said evenly. He shrugged and turned to Jeremy Taylor. "I fail to see the point to this ridiculous inquiry, but if it will make you all happier I shall be glad to submit to a search."

He held up his arms and smiled down at Reggie.

"I hope you are not disappointed, my young friend."

Professor Montmacy was fuming in the background.

"This is a lot of damn foolishness, Taylor," he snapped. "We've got our man."

Jeremy Taylor was going slowly through the doctor's pockets. From a side coat pocket he removed a neat, .32 caliber revolver. He glanced at it significantly as he laid it on the library table.

"For shooting mice, no doubt," Reggie remarked.

"I have a permit for the gun," the doctor said acidly.

The remainder of the search was completed in silence. Taylor piled a small heap of miscellaneous personal effects and a few papers beside the .32 on the table.

"Nothing very incriminating there," he smiled.

"Of course not," Professor Montmacy said disgustedly.

"Reggie is just stalling for time," Jonathan said.

"What are those papers?" Reggie asked. His mouth felt dry and salty. This was his last stand. If the thinking cap didn't come through for him it would all be over.

Taylor flipped through the papers casually.

"Seems to be cross-word puzzles," he said.

"A hobby of mine," the doctor said. "I enjoy the mental stimulation of working problems. I trust it is not a criminal avocation."

Reggie knew with a bleak sense of foreboding that the end was near. He stalled desperately.

"How do we know they're cross-word puzzles?"

The doctor smiled and took the two sheets of paper from Taylor and handed them to Reggie.

"What do you think they are, my young friend?" he said.

Reggie took the papers numbly, while his brain raced feverishly, trying to think of something, anything, to prolong the inevitable. He glanced down at the papers and as he did the tiny bell suddenly pealed inside his head.

His muscles tensed instinctively; the bell was tingling with steady insistence. A feeling of power and confidence was coursing through his veins. He studied the criss-crossed lines of the cross-word puzzles with keen interest. And suddenly, from the orderly arrangement of the two papers, he could discern the outlines of a completely different design. The cross-word puzzles were an elaborately simple cryptogram.

"Give me a pencil," Reggie said.

"What for?" Taylor asked.

"I'll show you in a minute," he said. Again he was completely transported from his normal self by the medium of the thinking cap. Another intellect, another personality was directing his thoughts and actions.

"This apparently innocent cross-word puzzle is actually a clever code form," he said quietly. "I can break it in fifteen minutes if you gentlemen have the patience to wait. Concealed in this code, I am quite confident, we will find the essential information of Mr. Taylor's important fuel pump. Our ambitious Doctor Adams obviously was thoughtful enough to copy the designs of the pump in code before planting the original plans in my room. This diverted suspicion completely from him and assured his making a clean get-away."

REGGIE paused and looked up at the doctor.

"Extremely clever, doctor," he said. "It's a pity that such intelligence should be expended so unavailingly. If you think I am bluffing, I suggest we wait and put the matter up to the F.B.I."

Doctor Adams' hands clenched and unclenched spasmodically. He glared balefully at Reggie and his lips twisted in a sneer that completely transformed his solid, respectable features.

"You——" His voice broke into a bellow of rage. With a suddenness that was completely surprising he leaped to the mantel and grabbed a heavy earthen vase and hurled it at Reggie.

Reggie ducked, but not quite in time. The vase struck his shoulder and caromed off to the floor; but its contents of water spilled out when it struck him, thoroughly dousing his head and neck.

Adams wheeled and scooped his gun from the table. With another incredibly swift motion he jerked the papers from Reggie's hands and backed toward the door.

"I will be leaving you now," he said harshly. "It won't be wise or healthy to follow me."

Reggie staggered to his feet, water dripping down his face.

"Stop!" he cried.

"Try to stop me!" Adams said softly. "Don't you think this gun is loaded?"

The bell started ringing again in Reggie's head and he almost chuckled aloud. For suddenly he knew with complete certainty that Adams' gun was not loaded! The thinking cap, which never made a mistake, was giving him a definite "go" signal. Adams' gun was empty and that was all Reggie wanted to know.

"Here I come," he yelled.

He dove across the room toward Adams, and, at the same instant, Adams' gun coughed twice and spurts of flame belched from the muzzle.

Reggie felt something tug at his sleeve, and a hot wind fanned past his cheek. He realized, then, that he was being shot at. Something had gone radically wrong! The doctor's gun wasn't supposed to be loaded!

BUT he couldn't stop himself now. His initial rush had carried him halfway across the room. He left his feet in a head-first tackle that brought his driving shoulder squarely into the doctor's midriff.

They went down to the floor in a tangled heap; and before the doctor could get his gun into action again, Jeremy Taylor had wrested it from his hand and slugged him on the head with it. The doctor sighed and passed out.

Willing hands helped Reggie to his feet. He was still too unnerved at the thought of the doctor's loaded gun to be able to think coherently.

"Magnificently done," Taylor said. "I've never seen such an exhibition of raw courage in all my life."

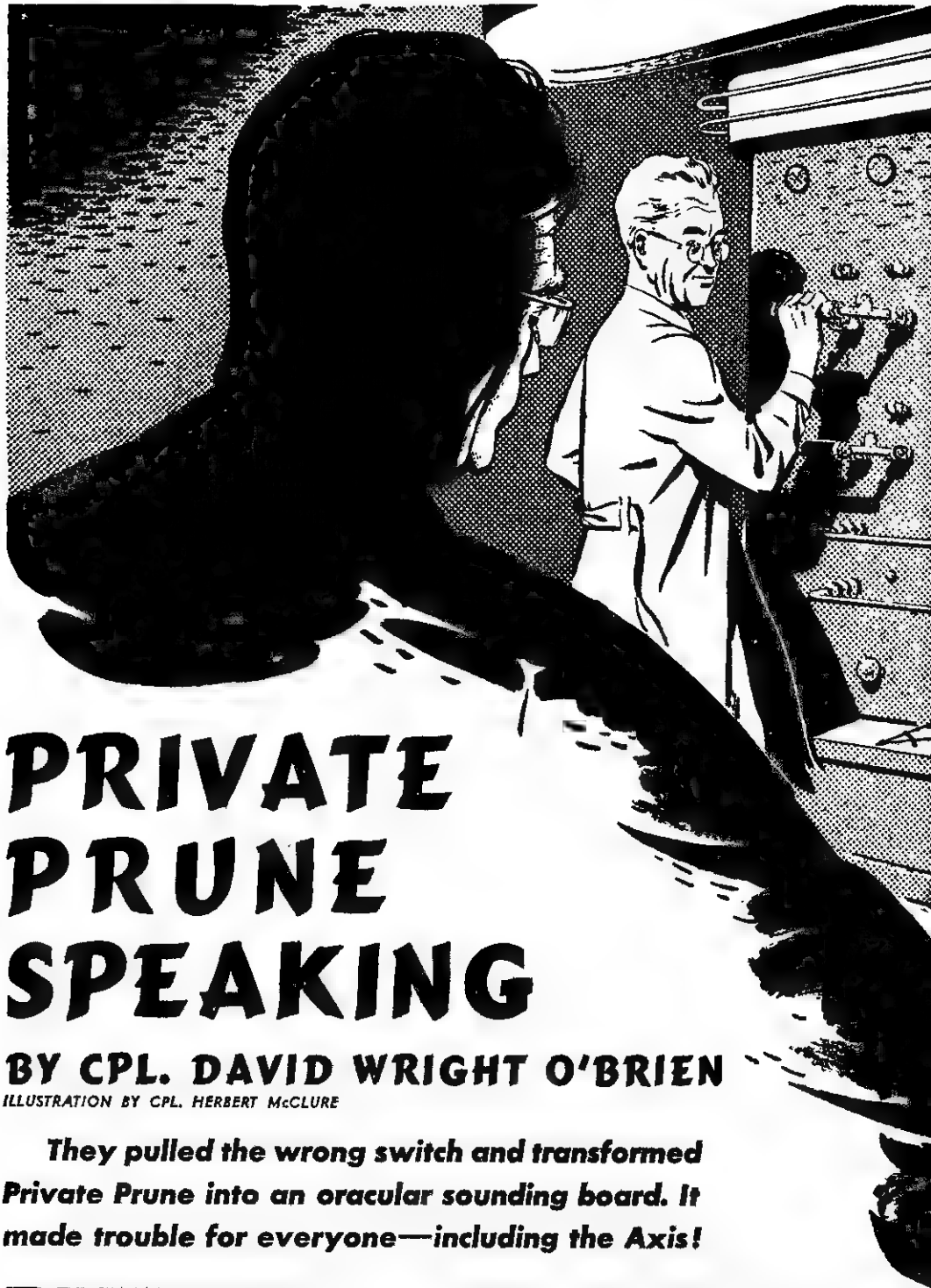
Reggie swallowed the huge lump in his throat. His knees felt unequal to the job of holding him up. Alice came to his side and took his arm.

"Reggie, you were wonderful!"

Congratulations were pouring in on him from all sides and the professor and Major Lionhead were struggling with each other in trying to pump his one free hand. But Reggie's thoughts were elsewhere.

He couldn't figure out what had happened. The thinking cap had failed him treacherously. In what was undoubtedly the most important moment of his life it had given him a bum steer.

And then suddenly it dawned on him. The complete explanation. He put a hand to his damp, still soaking head and smiled. That was it. He drew Alice to him and kissed her soundly. Everything was fine. The thinking cap had just been all wet!



PRIVATE PRUNE SPEAKING

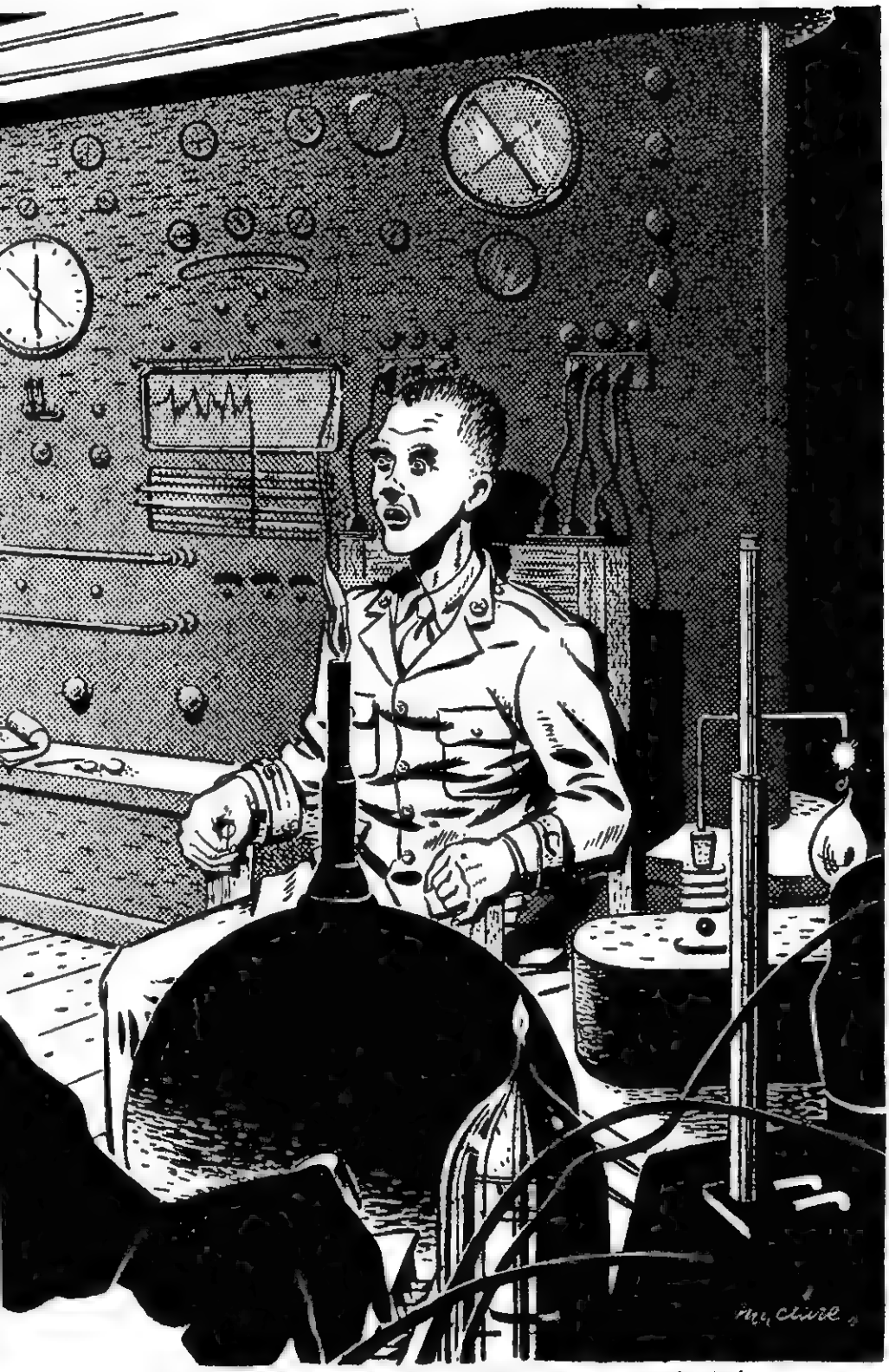
BY CPL. DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

ILLUSTRATION BY CPL. HERBERT McCLURE

They pulled the wrong switch and transformed Private Prune into an oracular sounding board. It made trouble for everyone—including the Axis!

PERCIVAL PRUNE was never quite certain how he had wound up in the Army. This fuzzy retrospect, however, did not make Prune unique among his comrades in the service. Many of them were just as puzzled about that as he.

What did make Prune's case some-



Private Prune pressed palsied palms against the arm rests—and waited

what distinctive was the fact that on twenty-three occasions previous to his being drafted into service, Private Percival Prune had tried—quite unsuccessfully—to volunteer his services to the Army, the Coast Guard, the Marines, the Navy, and once, by typical mistake, to the Women's Auxiliary. Each of these units had turned down Prune cold, had told him to return only in case there was fighting in the streets of Boston.

What had gone awry with he usual smooth machinations of the draft board in Percival Prune's district, no one would ever know. But it may be presumed that some official, suffering the after-effects of a bad night, had dipped into the wrong file one dismal morning to pull forth Prune's card The rest had been mere routine.

A small, watery-eyed, frightened, horse-faced Percival Prune had reported to Camp Carroll one bleak December morn for induction, scarcely twenty days after the first mistake had been made. That much is known as to the "how" of Prune's entrance into the United States Army.

At Camp Carroll, consequently, the Army career of Private Prune began. And at Camp Carroll, faced with his first interview, Prune bared the drab details of his scarcely adequate background.

"What was your occupation?" the interviewer asked pleasantly.

"I—ah—I tuned harps," said Prune.

The classifier had solemnly entered this on Prune's Form 20. He then learned Prune's weekly wages—a modest sum, modestly stated—the fact that he was unmarried, entirely without relations, to his knowledge, and that he was thirty-six years old, did not snore, wet his bed, or suffer fits.

"What do you like best?" asked the classifier in an at-your-ease tone.

Prune, going through the agonies of hell at the fear that he might be rejected, answered, "Olives."

The interviewer hadn't delved further into this. He merely added it to the Form 20. Prune, who hadn't realized that he'd spoken the first foolish word that entered his head, let it pass.

The classifier was human, and he was tired. His job wasn't, at best, an exciting one. Here he had what might, under the most favorable of circumstances, be termed an inductee who tuned harps, liked olives, and looked like a refugee from a red corpuscle. What in the hell was he supposed to do with a guy like this?

The interviewer looked at Prune's Army IQ grade, hoping to find some solace there. It was disappointingly average. He sighed, and stared for a moment into the eager, pleading eyes of Percival Prune.

It was then that the classifier got his idea for his mad prank. He smiled thinly, began busily scratching a number of statements and dates onto Prune's record card. He looked up during the proceedings, once to ask:

"You want action, honest-to-God combat?"

Prune had nodded, too thrilled to speak.

And the classifier had continued to make his mysterious code markings on Prune's Form 20, his face now bathed in a grin of sheer, malicious deviltry.

When he finished, he looked up and said, "Go back to your barracks, Private Prune. You can count on shipment from this camp in less than a week. You're in the Air Corps."

What he didn't tell Prune was merely that he had classified him as "611," aerial gunner, had altered dates and records on Prune's form card to make it appear as though he had been through a gunnery school and won his wings as a marksman of the sky.

But the magic words that Percival Prune had heard, "You're in the Air Corps," were enough to make him oblivious to anything but the fact that he had achieved the most incredibly wild, ecstatically wonderful, of all his dream wishes.

Private Percival Prune was a member of the Army Air Forces!

THE classification wag had predicted the day of Private Prune's departure from Camp Carroll almost to the hour. And in less than a week after his entrance into the Army, Prune found himself heading for the never quiet acres of Penning Field, where trained the 300th Bombardment Group. Obviously, the shipping department had been surprised to find that a certain Private Prune, an aerial gunner, no less, had somehow mistakenly been sent to Camp Carroll and barracked with a group of raw recruits. And just as obviously, they had taken hasty pains to rectify this mistake by shipping him off to an Air Corps bombardment unit where he belonged. They were hardly to blame for his error. They had only Prune's doctored Form 20 to go by.

"So your name is Prune, eh?" said First Sergeant Rice of the 300th Bombardment Group's Squadron C, several days later.

"Y-y-yessir," said Prune.

First Sergeant Rice blinked at this. He was about to snarl an objection at the use of "sir" in addressing him, then changed his mind. Getting such a tag from an aerial gunner—one of the most cocky and highly arrogant species of life known to man, on Rice's book—was so incomprehensible as to be treated with awe. Incoming aerial gunners usually wore a to-hell-with-you look when being welcomed by First Sergeant Rice. They almost invariably looked and acted as if they wanted to tell him how they preferred to have the squadron run during their stay there. It came to the sergeant, quite suddenly, that he might be having his leg pulled in some subtle fashion. He glowered, just to keep in practice.

"Are you being funny?"

Private Prune gulped, his Adam's apple riding visibly up and down his scrawny throat.

"N-n-n-no sir," he said.

The repitition of that last word was enough to convince Sergeant Rice that his worst suspicions had foundations. Here was a subtle gagster. A smart operator. A cocky gunner who was trying, in a silkily smooth way, to make an ass of him by innuendo. First Sergeant Rice bristled.

"Okay, bright boy. I see you're here as a replacement gunner. As soon as you can get your bags over to Barracks Ninety, you can replace a man on K.P. You'll find the mess hall half a block to the east of the barracks. Don't think you can stay wise around here and get along."

A dazed and bewildered Percival Prune found a bed for himself in the upper bay of Barracks Ninety, left his barracks bags there as a claim, and hurried to the mess hall. On his arrival there, he found that First Sergeant Rice had telephoned, and that the mess was expecting Private Prune.

"Okay, you," said the mess supervisor. "Get over there on the China Clipper."

Prune's heart leaped. China Clipper! Then he looked about, baffled. But this was a mess hall; there was no visible evidence of a huge, ocean-spanning airplane—

"Hey, you," said the mess sergeant. "Get movin'."

Prune continued to look bewildered.

"Ain't you never been on K.P. before?" the mess sergeant demanded in-

credulously. Private Prune shook his head. The mess sergeant shook his head—in sheer wonder. Then a delighted grin came to his face.

"Well, I'm damned. Here's a gunner who's never had no K.P. How long you been in this army, bud?"

"A week," answered Prune truthfully.

"Don't get wise with me, bud," said the mess sergeant. "This ain't no place for jokes. This ain't no vaudeville stage. C'mere. I'll show you the China Clipper."

He took Private Prune ungently by the arm, led him around a corner to a small room which seemed utterly enshrouded by steam. There were hoarse cries from within the room, staunch curses and the clatter of much dishware.

"There's your Clipper, bud," said the mess sergeant.

Private Prune was now able to discern a huge, frightening machine through the steam vapors. It gobbled up trays and cups and bowls like an ogre, sucking them into its secret stomach, then spewing them forth red-hot, steamy and sterilized.

"You—you mean it's a dishwashing machine?" bleated Prune.

"Now you're on the beam," said the mess sergeant. "Hey, Kletzki," he yelled. A big-shouldered Slav emerged, perspiring from the steam. "Put this guy to work, and see that he don't try to lie down on yuh."

"Yah," said Kletzki, and pulled Private Prune into the room. . . .

IT WAS early afternoon when Percival Prune returned, weary-footed, to his barracks. It should have been early evening, for the mess hall was still going and there was still another meal to serve before closing. But the irate mess sergeant had sent Prune packing after seventy-five cups, forty-three bowls, and eighteen pitchers had been broken. There had also been a matter of fifty-two mangled metal trays. The big gears of the China Clipper still contained shreds of the sleeve of Private Prune which had been caught there.

"If I keep you around another minute you'll blow up the joint," the mess sergeant had thundered. Then he had made Prune sign an extensive statement of charges, and had evicted him.

In his barracks, Prune sat down on the edge of his bunk and wondered what had gone wrong. He had been frantically willing, the very essence of eagerness. He had worked like mad, obeying every inflection of every command of Pusher Kletzki's voice. But everything had seemed to go awry. Private Prune was sad. He had messed up his first assigned duties at his new post. He wondered if it would do any good to see the first sergeant, to apologize, to try to explain, to beg for another chance. Then he decided that it might not be prudent. First Sergeant Rice had seemed to be a man of explosive temperment. He might, if pressed too much, throw Private Prune right out of the Army. He shuddered at that thought, then slowly began to unpack his things and arrange them the way he'd been taught at Camp Carroll.

He was rummaging through his barracks bags when the lieutenant came in. He wasn't aware of the young officer's presence until he heard a voice behind him asking, "New here, soldier?"

Prune turned, saw the young lieutenant, and his knees almost gave out from under him. This was the first officer to address him personally since he had been in the army.

"Y-y-yes sir," said Prune.

"Gunner?" asked the lieutenant.

Prune remembered having been called a gunner. He supposed that he was.

"Y-y-yes sir."

"I'm Lieutenant Ford, junior executive officer for Squadron C," said the officer. "I think you'll find our outfit pretty regular, soldier, just as long as you keep your nose clean and stay on the beam."

Private Prune almost went limp with gratitude. He smiled timidly, eyes watery.

"Better polish your brass," the lieutenant said. "Those shoes could do with a better shine. Your blouse is hung incorrectly, and you're minus patches on three shirts." His voice had suddenly became cold, full of authority. He glanced at Prune's barracks bags.

"That all the gear you have?" he asked.

Prune gulped, nodded.

"No B-4 bag, no flight pack?"

"N-n-no sir," said Prune.

"Never issued them?" The lieutenant seemed surprised.

"N-no sir," said Prune.

"Where was your last station? They should have attended to that at your last station."

"Camp Carroll, sir." Prune managed a reply without faltering.

"But that's not an Air Base. That's a replacement center for inductees, recruits."

"Yes, sir," gulped Prune. "I've only been in the Army six days."

This knocked the lieutenant back on his heels.

"But you told me you were a gunner!" he said indignantly.

"I only told you what they told me, sir," said Prune.

"*They* told you? Who's they?"

"The first sergeant, sir," Prune answered. "And the interviewer who put me in the Air Corps."

Young Lieutenant Ford's face was grave, his lips tight. Here, plainly, was a mess of some sort. He tried to recall how they had told him to handle messes of this sort back in Officer Candidate School. He couldn't recall anything beyond "mis-classifications." It would be best to bring the matter before his senior officer.

"You come with me," he told Prune sternly. "There's something screwy here. We're going to see Captain Talbot."

Percival Prune swallowed hard. Tears came to his eyes. A deep, sickening dread filled his soul. He was trapped! He had been discovered! Now they were going to throw him out of the Army! His lips trembled as he tried to phrase a never spoken plea for clemency.

"Come along," said Lieutenant Ford. "We're going to get to the bottom of all this."

Private Prune, like a gallery painting of an early Christian martyr, followed docilly after the lieutenant. . . .

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN EUSTACE TALBOT, Senior Executive Officer of Squadron C, 300th Bombardment Group, was a short, broad-shouldered, aggressive man in his middle forties. His hair was graying faintly at the temples, and his elegant, clipped moustache had just the proper tinge of gray in it to make a perfect contrast with his deeply tanned, glowing complexion.

Captain Talbot had been a washing-machine salesman before entering the Air Corps as an administrative officer, but you would never know it now. He looked, spoke, and acted with the terse, clipped drive of a man who is "Old Army." He sometimes regretted that he wasn't in the cavalry, so that he could slap a swagger stick against gleaming knee-high riding boots.

Captain Talbot was, at the moment,

engaged in a highly important conference. In his office was gathered a collection of military and civilian authority that would have floored the average officer.

Colonel Priddy, lean, sharp-featured, weather-beaten, acid-tongued commanding officer of Penning Field was there. So was a Major Branscome, a Lieutenant Colonel Fisher, a Colonel Hammer, and a pair of serious-miened civilians whose names were neon-lighted in the streets of scientific achievement.

"All our laboratory tests have been perfect," one of the civilian scientists was saying. "We need, now, only to put our discovery into operational flying practice. If everything goes as we expect it to, gentleman, our discovery will make radar seem like something concocted by a child."

"You will find Captain Talbot and the men of his squadron highly cooperative," rasped Colonel Priddy.

Captain Talbot cleared his throat modestly. "I am honored that our squadron was chosen to aid in these——"

Colonel Priddy cut him off. "It is ridiculous to remind you gentlemen that these experiments will be matters of the utmost secrecy. Never forget that fact."

"Our device," said one of the scientists, "must, of course, be first attuned to the climate and altitude of this locality. Of course, we will need a man to serve as a—ah—guinea pig, in this adjustment. One of your enlisted men will do. It's nothing of consequence. Just a routine alteration. After that, we'll be able to install the equipment in a dozen planes of your squadron, and carry on from there."

Captain Talbot, eager to show himself one hundred percent on the ball, stepped quickly to the door of his office, opened it, stuck his handsome head out into the orderly-room.

"Sergeant Rice," boomed Talbot. And then he saw Lieutenant Ford waiting in the corner, and realized that the lieutenant had in tow with him a small, frightened, trembling soldier.

"Yes, sir," said Sergeant Rice, from the other corner.

"Never mind, Sergeant," said Captain Talbot. He fixed a gleaming eye on Lieutenant Ford.

"L i e u t e n a n t," the Captain said, "please tell the soldier sitting beside your desk to come in here at once."

Lieutenant Ford looked surprised, then somewhat shocked. He opened his mouth to say something by way of explaining Private Prune's presence, and then recalled that his was not to question why. He turned to Private Percival Prune.

"Soldier, go into Captain Talbot's office, on the double."

PRUNE'S jaw went slack. Again his knees felt as insecure as wet noodles. His heart hammered wildly. This was worse than he had feared. The captain, with one swift, shrewd glance, had detected his presence as alien to military surroundings, and had demanded that he be brought before him instantly. Private Prune closed his eyes. He had awful visions of being taken out on a parade ground, snipped of his brass buttons while the drums rolled ominously. Perhaps he'd be shot, as an afterthought.

Lieutenant Ford's voice b r o u g h t Prune out of his nightmare of speculation.

"Well, hurry up!"

Percival Prune lurched to his feet. He started for the captain's office, remembered that the lieutenant had said on the double, tried to move more quickly, and began a long, sickening stumble that ended only when he collided with the door of the captain's of-

fice. It was standing slightly ajar.

Prune's scant weight was enough to give the door inward momentum. And the door's betrayal by refusing to support him resulted in Prune's being pitched headlong into the office of Captain Talbot.

"Well, I must say!" someone snorted.

From his position on the floor of Captain Talbot's office, Private Prune looked sickly upward. Gazing down at him, a circle of mingled emotions, were Captain Talbot, a colonel, a lieutenant colonel, a major, and two very eminent-looking civilians.

Prune scrambled wildly to his feet and began saluting like a windmill.

"Private Prune reporting as ordered. Private Prune, reporting as ordered. Private Prune, reporting as ordered," he squeaked hysterically.

"Turn off that phonograph," said Colonel Priddy coldly to Captain Talbot. "And make him stop waving his right arm in what he imagines to be a salute."

Captain Talbot didn't have to tell Prune. The acidly spoken remark of the colonel had been enough. Prune stopped squeaking his formulized entrance line, brought his waving right hand to his side, and assumed a rigid, ridiculous posture of attention.

There was little that Captain Talbot could say, save, "Here is a man you gentleman can use for your adjustments." He glared hard at Prune, for that little soldier had utterly ruined the entire swift, military pattern of the picture.

"Here is a man," Colonel Priddy said acidly, "who can obviously use a few adjustments."

The civilians laughed. Captain Talbot crimsoned, and Major Hammer, anxious to be on the good side of his senior officer and C.O., came in with a hearty, poorly-timed chuckle.

"We might as well get started, then," said one of the civilian scientists. He looked at Prune curiously, then turned to his companion.

"Yes," he said, "we might as well."

"Go along with them, soldier," Captain Talbot said to Prune. "You are to help them out on some adjustments."

Private Prune, deep in his own crimson hell, looked up bleakly, piteously.

"Y-y-y-yessir," he said. . . .

THE building to which Percival Prune was taken by the two eminent civilians, was a large, modern structure just inside an area marked "Restricted" by numerous sign posts and patrolled by two armed guards.

The civilians showed their passes to the guards, and Prune showed the pass which had been given him. When they entered the building Prune's mental state bordered on coma, for his mind was filled only by the hideous blunders he had made in entering the captain's office, the confusion he had momentarliy caused, and the gloomy certainty that this was now surely enough to result in his getting fired from the Army.

They took Prune to a large room containing a myriad of electrical equipment. All sorts of strange gadgets filled the place, but Prune, sickly worried, utterly disconsolate, paid no attention to his surroundings. They told him to sit down. He sat down. They told him to make himself comfortable while they got ready. He did his best to look like a man who has made himself comfortable.

After an interval which might have been five minutes or might have been thirty-five, they bade Prune to rise and take the seat they had prepared for him.

Prune moved from the straightbacked chair in which he had been sitting to the chair they indicated. He was barely conscious of the fact that it was a highly

unusual chair—a chair containing wires, and coils, and lights, and looking like something in which people were electrocuted. Prune was too deeply engrossed in his own morbid fancies to pay more than fleeting attention to any of this.

They attached a lead plate to Prune's wrist, after first wrapping the wrist with rubber bandaging. Then they wound more rubber bandaging over the plate. They repeated this process on his other wrist, then on both his ankles.

Each lead plate had a wire running from it to a machine on the right of the chair. The machine was a lacework of switches and small, flickering light bulbs.

Both gentlemen appraised the wiring job they had done on Prune. They seemed satisfied.

"Might as well throw the switch," said one.

The other nodded and moved over to the complicated switch panel.

"Ready?" he asked his contemporary.

"Now," said the other scientist.

The switch closed with a brisk snap; the board began to crackle; sparks flew; a humming filled the room.

Percival Prune came out of his daze. He screeched wildly, tried to rise from the chair, as if it had suddenly become filled with very sharp tacks.

"Turn it off," the man farthest from the switchboard yelled. "You've thrown the wrong switch!"

THE switch was turned off promptly. The sparks stopped, the humming whined off into silence. Both scientists turned slowly, fearfully, to the subject in the wired chair.

Private Percival Prune was out cold. His head was slumped forward on his chest, his body sagged limply in the chair.

"My God!" one of them gasped. "Have we——?"

The other had stepped swiftly to the chair, was leaning forward, his ear against Prune's frail chest.

"No," he announced with considerable relief. "No. We haven't killed the poor man. His heart is still beating strongly, though with shock flutter. But we certainly knocked him out cold."

"Too bad," said his companion vaguely. "We'll have to get another man. Don't make that mistake again."

"I didn't look when I reached for the switch panel. We'd better call for an ambulance, don't you think?"

It was at that moment that Prune sat up groggily.

"It's a great honor, my squadron being selected for these experimental tests," he said.

Both scientists whirled to face him.

"You all right, man?" they demanded.

Prune looked at them dazedly, and nodded.

"Y-y-yes," he managed. "I'm just fine. Can I go now?"

The scientists exchanged puzzled glances.

"That's odd," one said.

"Did you notice it, too?" asked the other.

"Notice what?" quavered Prune.

"Your voice," said the first scientist. "Repeat what you said when you regained consciousness a moment ago."

"I'm fine. Can I go now?" Prune repeated obediently.

"But that isn't what you said. Repeat what you said about these experimental tests being a great honor for your squadron."

Prune looked dismayed.

"But, please, I don't recall having said anything like that," he faltered.

The scientists exchanged frowns. "Of course you did," said the first. "Of course he did," said the second.

Prune was seized by a sudden panic. He had done something wrong again, or said something wrong.

"I—I don't understand you. Can I go now?"

"I'd swear it sounded like Talbot," said the first scientist. "The captain's voice is very distinctive. I couldn't mistake it."

"I agree with you," said the second. "That's what startled me. I'd have sworn Captain Talbot was here, when the soldier said that."

"Please," said Percival Prune, "can I go now?"

They both looked at him a moment.

"It isn't important," one shrugged. "We'd better get on with this adjustment. We'll need another man."

"Please," wailed Private Prune, "can I go now?"

"Oh, yes. Yes. Certainly, my good man. You may leave. I'll call Captain Talbot for another man."

Panic again gnawed sharply at Percival Prune.

"Wasn't I satisfactory?"

Both scientists smiled. One said. "Oh, eminently. We need another man, however. You've had enough for today."

They unwound Private Prune, helped him from the chair, escorted him to the door, thanked him profusely.

"Damnedest thing," said one, when Prune had gone. "I'd swear that he sounded exactly like his captain when he came out of his shock."

"So would I," the other agreed. "Odd, isn't it?"

They sighed, and went back to their work. . . .

CHAPTER III

PRIVATE PRUNE did not want to return to his squadron orderly-room for he felt certain that Lieutenant Ford would be there, impatient to get on with the business of ousting Prune from the Army. There, too, would be glowering First Sergeant Rice, and Captain Talbot, whom Percival had disgraced in front of so many important senior officers.

Private Prune did not want to do so, but there was little else he could do without getting deeper into trouble.

On the steps of the squadron orderly-room, Prune paused to gather courage, and to rehearse his opening line, "Private Prune returning from detail," with which he intended to greet Lieutenant Ford.

Mentally, he repeated this phrase, then started to whisper it to himself.

"I'll have no more of that slam-bang inefficiency around here," an acid, rasping voice said very loudly.

Private Prune went rigid with fear. The voice was that of Colonel Priddy, Commander of Penning Field!

Slowly, Prune looked over his shoulder, to see if the colonel was coming up the steps. But there was no sign of that dignitary in view. Then he was probably in the orderly room. Prune quailed. He hadn't counted on having to face the commander of the post as well as Lieutenant Ford and Captain Talbot.

He squared his shoulders, took a deep breath, and stepped into the orderly-room.

"Attention!" bellowed the voice of First Sergeant Rice.

Prune looked around the orderly-room in dismay. Everyone there had popped to rigid attention, and all eyes were on the door through which Prune had just entered.

Prune popped frightenedly to attention, not daring to look behind him.

The room was stonily silent in that touching military tableau for fully half a minute.

Then Sergeant Rice broke the silence with a puzzled, "At ease!"

Everyone relaxed and went on with what he had been doing before Rice had called attention. Private Prune relaxed cautiously, fearfully. He looked at the door behind him. There was no one there.

First Sergeant Rice fixed Prune with an accusing glare.

"I thought I heard the colonel's voice out there, and when the door opened, I thought you were the colonel coming in. That's why I called attention," he snapped. "Did the Old Man walk on past the orderly-room, here?"

"I—I didn't see him," said Prune.

"That's funny," said Rice. Then, "What in the hell do you want?"

Stumblingly, Prune explained his presence.

"Lieutenant Ford had to go over to Ordnance. He won't be back until late tonight," said First Sergeant Rice. "He left word that you are to report to him here in the orderly room first thing tomorrow morning. I don't know what it's all about, but, brother, you're in hot water."

"R-r-really?" Prune gasped sickly.

"Sssssssssss," said Rice, making a noise like steam. "But hot!"

The sick, frightened alarm on Prune's face made Rice feel much better. He grinned happily.

"Now get the hell outta here and go back to your barracks, Prune," he said, almost amiably.

Prune nodded miserably. Started to whisper his exit line. His lips moved.

"Sergeant Rice, come here at once!"

Captain Talbot's voice rang through the room.

The sergeant wheeled.

"Yes, sir," he said. Then he did a double take. Captain Talbot was nowhere to be seen. The door to his office was open, and that office was obviously empty. Nor was the squadron captain anywhere in the orderly-room office.

Private Percival Prune, his expression one of acute dismay, was backing slowly away in the direction of the door. First Sergeant Rice wheeled to face him again.

"Just a minute, Prune. Just a minute!"

PRUNE stood transfixed, frozen save for a pair of badly knocking knees.

"Did you say that?" Rice demanded.

"S-s-s-say what?" Prune croaked.

"Tell me to 'come here,' in Captain Talbot's voice, no less?" said Rice menacingly. "Did you?"

Prune was too badly frightened to speak. He shook his head in a wild negative.

Sergeant Rice frowned. He scratched his almost bald head. He glared doubtfully at Prune.

"Don't tell me I'm hearing voices," he snarled. "First the colonel's, then the captain's."

"May I go now?" begged Private Prune.

First Sergeant Rice gave Prune one last suspicious, searching glance. Then he nodded vaguely.

"Yeah, take off. But be in here first thing tomorrow morning."

Private Prune moved strickenly to the door. He was on the steps, taking deep breaths of fresh air, when Colonel Priddy came around the corner of the orderly-room.

Prune snapped rigidly to attention.

The colonel was coming up the steps on which Prune was standing. With him was the major who'd been at his side when Prune had stumbled in on Captain Talbot's conference an hour or so ago.

Prvate Prune tried to squeeze himself into nothingness as the colonel and the major stamped up the steps on which

he stood. But he needn't have bothered. Neither paid the slightest attention to him. They moved indifferently past him to the door.

It was then that Prune heard Colonel Priddy exclaim:

"I'll have no more of this slam-bang inefficiency around here!"

Private Prune gulped, closed his eyes. Then the pair was past him, in the orderly-room, and the door was closed behind them. Percival Prune relaxed from his ram-rod pose of attention, grabbed the hand rail of the stairs for support.

Inside, he heard the startled voice of First Sergeant Rice calling attention.

Private Prune stood there, too weak to move, taking deep, fish-like gulps of air. He was very badly shaken. And it was at that instant that Captain Talbot appeared around the corner, face wrathful, and started for the steps where Prune stood.

Again Percival Prune hurled himself into a pose of rigid attention and tried to make himself invisible. Captain Talbot was alone. He brushed by Prune unseeingly, stormed into the orderly-room, leaving the door open.

Prune heard the captain's voice say:

"Sergeant Rice, come here at once!"

This was too much for Percival Prune. It filled his soul with a deep and sickening dread. He began to tremble like a man in the last stage of a tropical fever. Weakly, he made his way down the steps. He had to pause twice for rest on the way back to his barracks.

Percival Prune's heart, soul and mind were in a state of terrible turmoil. For there was in each of those parts of him, the small, positive, terrifying certainty that his vocal organs, his own tongue, had actually, on the occasions that misled Sergeant Rice, spoken in perfect imitation of Colonel Priddy and Captain Talbot.

And, what was somehow even more terrifying, the words that had come uncontrollably to his lips, in their voices, were repeated by the colonel and the captain themselves, to the letter and the most minute shading of inflection, less than five minutes later!

Private Prune was more than shaken. He was engulfed in a tidal wave of fear and eerie misery. Something was wrong. Something was radically wrong. Something inexplicable. Something over which he had no control.

He tried to whisper a reassurance to himself.

But he had no sooner made the effort to form words, than the voice of Colonel Priddy, rasping and acid, came from his lips.

"I'll damn soon get to the bottom of this," said Colonel Priddy's voice.

PRIVATE PRUNE clamped his jaws shut the moment those last words left his lips.

For they had left *his* lips. They had been spoken by him—by Private Prune—by no one else. Spoken by him, even though the voice, inflection, and ringing anger of the words had all been unmistakably the property of Colonel Priddy.

And now Prune was certain of one dread fact.

The terrible something that had him in its power was, basically, a sort of mocking-bird-itis which made him a perfect, though unwitting, vocal mimic of others.

And it was something more than that, too. It was something quite beyond a mere inexplicable mimicry that permitted him to sound like people other than himself. *It was something that enabled him to say their words in advance of their actual utterance!*

The strange malady that beset Private Prune reached out, so to speak, like some advance-wave radio. It picked up the voices and words of oth-

ers—voices saying words destined to be spoken minutes later—and broadcast them through the helpless vocal chords of Percival Prune.

What else could it be?

Percival Prune had volunteered for the Army more times than he could recall. But he wasn't completely stupid. He was smart enough, at least, as he stood there with the horror of his situation gradually dawning on him, to realize that he had somehow, some way, become a sort of combination of sounding board and ouija board. A sort of human Grand Canyon that produced echoes of sounds before the sounds were uttered.

All of which, Prune knew, was ridiculous. Impossible. Utterly beyond belief. But true.

So Prune stood there, trembling, not daring to think any further into the insidious complications that his dilemma might bring on.

His brow was beaded with sweat. He discovered this when he touched his hand to his forehead to find out if he had a fever. All the physical manifestations of his malady indicated that he was seriously ill.

Prune decided that he did not want to return to his barracks immediately. The barracks might be crowded. There might be other soldiers there. His affliction might reveal itself again—or, worse, his bodily tremors might be so obvious as to cause his comrades to send him off to the hospital.

He did not want to go to the hospital. In the hospital, if they couldn't cure him, they might throw him out of the Army.

Prune decided to go to the post exchange. He might be able to find a quiet corner there. He would be able to have a glass of milk and a ham sandwich and wrestle with his dread dilemma.

The orderly-room was between the PX and Prune's barracks. The window of Captain Talbot's office was open, and Prune passed beneath it on his way to the exchange.

It was then that he heard Colonel Priddy's voice coming from that office.

"I'll damn soon get to the bottom of this," Prune heard Priddy storm.

He shuddered, for the sentence had a grim familiarity. It was the same sentence spoken by Prune himself, in Priddy's voice, a few moments before. . . .

SINCE most of the men on the base were at the moment on duty, Percival Prune found the post exchange restaurant comparatively deserted. And, realizing this as he gazed timidly around the place, Prune felt sorry he hadn't gone to the barracks. It wouldn't have been crowded after all. He might have been able to climb into his bunk and cover himself with a blanket, cloistered with his troubles and free from outside interference.

Nevertheless, the smell of food and the comfortable warmth of the place were factors strong enough to persuade Prune to stay at the PX long enough to have the sandwich and milk he had planned on.

He gave the restaurant counter another nervous glance, saw a completely deserted section at the far end, and moved down there for a seat.

The waitress who came up to take his order a moment later was blonde, red-lipped, and bored. She gave Prune the most casual of glances.

"What'll it be?"

Private Prune opened his mouth to give his order.

"BLAT-AT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT!"

The noise was sudden, deafening, and —to all in the PX—utterly terrifying. And it came from Prune's mouth.

It was the unmistakable, ear-splitting banging of a caliber .50 machine gun!

A sergeant, who'd been sitting peacefully in front of a cup of coffee on the other side of the counter a moment before, hurled himself to the floor with frantic urgency.

Several soldiers and three officers at the magazine counter in the far corner of the exchange duplicated the sergeant's instant reaction, madly crawling behind the shelter of a counter.

Only the waitresses and salesgirls—and Private Prune—remained above floor level. And even they—particularly Prune—were frozen in shocked horror.

The noise that rattled so terrifyingly from Prune's throat had stopped after its short burst, and now the silence was ringing.

Private Prune gulped miserably. In all his life he had never heard the din of a caliber .50 machine gun, save in the movies. And though this had been much louder and considerably more frightening, he had realized instinctively what the sound had been.

By now the sergeant across the counter had climbed cautiously to one knee, and was peeking over the spilled remains of his coffee. His eyes were wide with fear, amazement, and a bewildered suspicion.

It was the waitress who spoke first.

"What was the idea of that?"

Private Prune met her hostile, accusing stare for only an instant, then he turned his head away, crimsoning.

"I—I was just clearing my throat," Prune mumbled.

The sergeant, braced by the waitress' calm, had climbed to his feet. He leaned over the counter, glaring redly at Prune, and pointed a trembling finger.

"Y-you done that?" he demanded irately. "You made them machine gun sounds? It sure sounded that way."

Percival Prune slipped sideways on his stool, his eyes searching frantically for the nearest exit. He could see the others of his comrades-in-arms, who had dropped to the floor at the gunfire sounds, rising to their feet, coming out from behind the shelter of counters, brushing themselves off, and looking unanimously displeased about it all.

Prune shook his head in a jerky negative, got to his feet, and started for the nearest door.

"Hey there, you!" someone shouted.

"Just a minute, soldier," another voice cried.

BUT Private Prune didn't tarry. He broke into a scrambling run, made the doorway, and leaped down the steps two at a time. He ran until his lungs were bursting, two blocks, three, four. Exhaustion finally forced him to stop, and he found himself staggering gaspingly along a deserted squadron street which he recognized as being in the vicinity of his own barracks.

As far as Prune could ascertain from harried glances over his shoulder, no one had pursued him from the Post Exchange. He relaxed somewhat.

Prune paused and put his head in his hands. His body was seized by a sudden trembling which, with his prolonged and arduous gasping, shook him from head to foot.

Private Prune felt ill, and utterly frightened.

Something—to quote an advertising slogan—new had been added. To his hideous repertoire of unwilling voice broadcasts was now added sounds. Any kind of sounds, apparently; for machine-gun sounds were certainly an indication of the versatility his curse was taking on.

Private Prune felt reasonably certain that his unwitting machine-gun sound

reproduction was caused by no other fact than that machine guns, somewhere out on the planes on the flight line, were probably going to be tested a few minutes after Prune forecast their racket. The fact that he hadn't seen the guns, and that the distance from the PX to the flight line was greater than any previous distances over which he had picked up sounds-to-be-heard, indicated —if anything—that his dread plague was growing stronger.

Private Prune, suddenly conscious of the fact that the position he had assumed in the squadron street was one to attract attention, took his head from his hands and tried, earnestly, to stop trembling.

This effort produce little in the way of results. He was able to control the tremors in his quaking knees well enough to walk, but that was about all. He still trembled violently, and his teeth chattered like castanets in a high wind.

It was the chattering of his teeth that Prune minded most. For while they chattered he was unable to keep his mouth shut—naturally enough. And the constant fear that his open mouth would produce further pre-broadcasts of voices and sounds was acute.

Prune had gone half a block when his fear of further demonstration of the plague was realized. All, of course, because of his chattering teeth and open mouth.

It was music that came from his voice box this time—band music!

It was highly audible, very vigorous, and quite stirring martial music. But it didn't, of course, please poor Percival Prune.

Miserably, he halted, frozen where he stood. The martial air came from his chattering jaw majestically and with awful loudness.

Someone in a barracks just across the street from where Prune stood rooted in terror, opened a window and thrust forth his head. No doubt a curious G.I. who wanted to see the military band he thought was passing by in the squadron street.

Prune was jolted into motion by the sound of the opening window and the appearance of the head.

Over the din his larynx was making, Prune heard the soldier shout:

"Hey, fella, where in the hell's that music coming from?"

Prune gave the questioner a glassy stare and started to run. Then he changed his mind, slowed his abrupt flight, and started to march off in the other direction—in perfect step to the martial air that was blaring from his mouth.

AT THE corner, Prune could hold his masquerade no longer. He turned down it and started a mad sprint. In less than three frantic strides, the music within him ceased as abruptly as it had started. In something like two dozen strides more, Private Prune realized that he was no longer giving out with "The Stars and Stripes Forever," and he came to an abrupt and sickly relieved halt.

Private Prune felt cold and sick and limp. But the trembling, like the music, had also ceased. He was able to clamp his jaws firmly together and hold them that way—much to his tearful joy.

He looked around, trying to find the direction to his barracks. The barracks just across the street from him had a sign below its number. The sign read "Air Base Band H.Q."

Prune was staring from it when "The Stars and Stripes Forever" roared forth once more.

For a moment Prune almost collapsed. He'd been certain that the music was again coming from his mouth

—even though his jaws were clamped to prevent such a recurrence. But to his vast relief, such was not the case.

The tune was coming from Band Headquarters just across from him. Obviously the members of the band were there rehearsing. A fact that suddenly made it clear to Prune how he had picked up the pre-broadcast of the same number they were now playing. The waves, or whatever it was that caused his awful plight, had been close and strong. They had blared out in broadcast from his mouth because they had been due to blare forth in a few moments, and Prune had been nearby to send them forth in advance.

Prune shut his eyes against the horror of his deductions. Now he could add music to his terrible repertoire. Voices, noises, music. Anything and everything could—and did—emerge from his helpless larynx.

Unconsciously, Prune fell in step with the marching rhythm of the tune the band across the street was playing. He moved along almost robot-like in this manner for half a block, trying to shut off the spigot of his terror by stopping his mind against it.

But it wasn't much use. At the corner, Prune came into view of his own barracks, and he regained his bearings for the first time. He sighed, then remembered that such luxuries as sighs might result in further pre-broadcasting. He clamped his jaws tight once more, and set out across the street toward his barracks.

Desperately Prune was hoping that, in the seclusion of his quarters, he might find sleep and some respite from his plague. Sleep, too, he reasoned not too convincingly, might provide a miraculous cure for his mysterious malady. He might wake up to find himself normal once again.

But in spite of his wistful wishful thinking, Percival Prune could feel the symptoms of his strange sickness returning. The chills were coming back, and the uncontrollable shivering that was a part of them.

WHEN Percival Prune returned to his barracks, he crawled immediately into bed, drew his blankets over his head, and lay there shivering. He closed his eyes trying to blot out the horror that seemed to engulf him, but it helped little. Nothing helped. He could only lie there trembling, biting his lip, and wondering what had come over him.

The trembling that had been fear, was now something more than that, something apparently prompted by an actual physical chill. It seemed to Prune that he was being seized by waves of electrical impulses which lifted him dizzyingly into crest upon crest of current shocks. His lips were dry, and his tongue seemed caked. And when he timidly touched his forehead, he found it hot, dry, almost feverishly burning.

He tried to tell himself that he was all right, but made the mistake of trying to do so vocally. The result was terrifying, for when Prune tried to form the words his vocal cords were again seized by a power greater than his will, and an utterly alien voice came forth instead of his own. It was a voice he had never heard before, saying words over which he had no control.

"Good. There is nobody here. We can talk in safety. Let's get to the point. There is no time to waste."

The voice was low, urgent. It's enunciation was clear, but with the faintest suggestion of a lisp.

Prune opened his mouth again to groan his dismay, and found himself answering that voice in another voice. Another unfamiliar voice.

"You have it all?" this other voice

said, as Prune's lips moved to form the words. "Good. We can proceed."

This second voice was also urgent. But it was low, almost guttural.

Percival Prune clamped his jaws shut tight. He wanted no more evidence of his plight. He buried his head deeper under his blankets. The vast electrical waves began to sweep over him again. His teeth chattered. He felt his tongue moving in his mouth. He couldn't keep his jaws shut.

"Good God, sir," he heard himself saying in Captain Talbot's voice. "If this is true, it will ruin me!"

"And what in hell do you think it will do to me?" an acidly rasping voice, that of Colonel Priddy, answered from Prune's lips.

Private Prune clamped his jaws hard over a section of his blanket which he stuffed into his mouth. His teeth stopped chattering, his tongue, jammed as it was, formed no more words in voices alien to it.

It was then that Prune heard the steps coming up the barracks stairs to the upper bay where he lay shivering beneath his blankets.

Prune tried, through sheer physical resistance, to control his trembling, to lie quietly. He succeeded to some extent.

The footsteps paused at the top of the stairs. There had been two pairs of them. Now there was a moment of silence, while the owners of those footsteps looked around the upper bay.

Then one of them spoke.

"Good. There is nobody here. We can talk in safety. Let's get to the point. There is no time to waste."

It was all Percival Prune could do to keep from screaming, as that voice came to his ears. The same voice which he had heard issuing from his own lips just a few minutes before—saying words phrased exactly as they had been when they came from Prune's uncontrollable larynx.

Private Prune's fingers bit deep into his mattress cover as he tried to control himself.

THEN the second voice spoke. And it was the voice in which Prune had answered the first, scant minutes ago. Low, urgent, almost guttural, saying familiar words. Words that it had used on Prune's own tongue.

"You have it all?"

"Of course," said the first voice.

"Good, we can proceed," said the guttural voice.

"It's up here," said the first voice, "carelessly tucked away in my stationery box on the shelf. I knew they'd never look in the obvious place."

There was a moment's silence, a grunt of satisfaction, then the second voice said:

"Ahhhh, fine. Very excellent work. With these papers our Fatherland will be saved much time and research. Let Yankee brains work it out. We perfect it!"

"We'd better hurry," the first voice said. "Fritz and the others will be waiting by the road just off the south runway fence. It is important to lose no time. They don't want to spread an alarm until they are positive the papers are missing. We've only that long. They are almost sure now."

"Let's get going!"

It was then that the tidal waves tossed Private Prune sky-high on their electrical crests. His jaws came unclamped from the blanket as the spasms shook him.

And it was then that he heard himself say, in the guttural accent of the second speaker:

"Ach, Schweinehund! There is someone here!

There was a sharp intake of breath

from the corner of the bay where the two men had been talking. Then an instant of ominous silence. Private Prune had betrayed his presence.

Then the guttural voice exclaimed:

"*Ach, Schweinehund!* There is someone here!"

Private Prune groaned dismally, threw his blankets back, and swayed to a sitting position on the bunk. He blinked in the semi-darkness of the bay, his body going through convolutions of trembling.

Two men were coming swiftly toward his bunk. They both wore the uniforms of U. S. soldiers. They looked extremely irate at having had an audience to their conversation.

One was tall, lean, blondly handsome. The other was short, barrel-chested, swarthy, with a scared face. The second had a .45 caliber automatic, Army make, in his hand. He had just taken it from the pocket of his G.I. overcoat. Now he was pointing it at Private Prune.

Percival Prune rose to his feet, staring pop-eyed at the obviously hostile approach. He was so frightened that his trembling had ceased.

"It is too bad that you happened to be around," said the short, swarthy, guttural-voiced man.

"There is no time for speech-making, Ernst," said the tall, blond chap. "Put him out of the way and let us get going."

"A little closer, Paul," said Ernst. "One shot makes noise enough. Two would be too many. Close and careful aim, one shot."

It was suddenly crystal clear to Private Percival Prune that these two soldiers intended to shoot him. It had taken a surprising number of seconds for this fact to register, but then Private Prune was not in a normal state of mind or body.

The two were less than five feet away, and the swarthy one, called Ernst, was smiling unpleasantly in anticipation of the task at hand.

IT WAS then that Percival Prune opened his mouth in a frantic attempt to plead for mercy.

And it was then that Prune once more heard a voice other than his own issuing from his lips. This time it was the voice of First Sergeant Rice, and it came forth in a husky, startled bellow.

"Well, I'll be damned! What in the hell is going on around here?"

The effect was instantaneous.

"It's Rice!" snarled the blond man.

Both Paul and Ernst wheeled away from Prune, staring wide-eyed at the entrance to the bay just off the staircase, their eyes searching for the presence of First Sergeant Rice, whose voice they were certain they'd heard.

At that opportune moment, when both had their backs turned to him, Private Percival Prune made a frantic dash for safety.

It was unfortunate that the aisle between the beds in the bay was narrow, and it was also unfortunate that Prune was still clutching a blanket in his hands when the two had started for him. For now Prune bolted down the narrow middle aisle, prompted by sheer panic, blanket still in his hands, and ran headlong into the backs of his two antagonists.

It was the frantic strength of his effort, rather than his negligible weight, which resulted in Prune's knocking Paul and Ernst off their feet. It was sheer gravity that carried Private Prune and the G.I. blanket down atop the two in a tangle of arms and legs.

The blanket had somehow gotten wrapped around Paul and Ernst, and Percival Prune had somehow kept his frantic clutch on the blanket. The result was simple. Ernst and Paul, wound

up in the blanket and flat on their backs, threshed madly at each other, each thinking the other to be Prune, and inflicting a sizeable amount of damage through this misapprehension. Prune, tangled in the mess to the point where he seemed likely at any instant to be thrown to the ceiling like a rider from a bucking horse, clung frantically to the edges of his blanket to preserve his skull.

The accompanying din was incredible.

So incredible that it drowned out the clatter of feet coming up the staircase.

The threshing party heaved and tossed and cursed and banged back and forth in the narrow aisle until, inevitably, Prune and the pair beneath the blanket, came in contact with a two-story bed, tipping it down on them with a resounding crash.

It was at this point that Ernst's pistol went off and here that the iron double-high bedstead knocked Prune cold in its descent.

And it was but a split second later when Sergeant Rice burst into the upper bay of the barracks, with a panting colonel and a winded captain hard on his heels.

First Sergeant Rice roared thunderously:

"Well, I'll be damned! What in the hell is going on around here?"

But he wasn't damned for long. Colonel Priddy spied the official manila envelope, bulging with the papers on the super-radar experimental data, lying on the floor where Ernst had dropped it in the melee.

Captain Talbot saw the army automatic that had skittered from under the blanket when Ernst had accidentally discharged it. First Sergeant Rice saw only a fight, which was contrary to discipline, and which he could legally enjoy in the process of quelling.

All three men hurled themselves on the groggy Ernst and Paul as one, tearing the beaten, punch-drunk pair of conspirators out from under Prune, the bedstead, and the blanket.

Colonel Priddy grabbed the envelope with the precious secret data. Captain Talbot thoughtfully secured the .45. First Sergeant Rice grabbed the two culprits, knocking their heads together in his enthusiasm.

"They was fighting, against regulations," joyfully boomed Rice, smashing their heads together again, just to keep in practice.

"Considerably more than that. They were armed," said Captain Talbot, displaying the weapon.

"All that is posh," elaborated Colonel Priddy. "They were the blank-blank-sons-of-blank spies who stole the super-radar data. Look. Here it is."

It was a moment later when they noticed Private Percival Prune, lying quite unconscious under the overturned double-deck bed.

First Sergeant Rice whistled audibly, his eyes mirroring the stark admiration and envy he felt.

"And look at who it was that discovered 'em, and stopped 'em," he said almost reverently. . . .

WHEN they came to Private Percival Prune with the decoration, two days later, he was still in bed in the Station Hospital. The gash on his head had almost healed, but his temperature had—for a full thirty hours—been high enough to warrant their holding him for observation.

But Private Prune hadn't minded being held. They had assured him that he wouldn't be dismissed from the service because of a high temperature. And —what was vastly more important—his malady had completely disappeared. Prune, too excitedly delighted about

this to dare hope that it was true, attributed it vaguely to his having been cracked on the head by the bed. That was the only reasonable explanation he could think of.

The nurses had been kind and most attentive. They had called him a hero on several occasions, but Prune had been too embarrassed to ask them what they were talking about. Colonel Priddy's visit, therefore, came as an overwhelming surprise to Prune.

The colonel stamped into Prune's ward late on the afternoon of that second day in the hospital. He came directly over to Prune's bed. Prune was far too shocked to perceive that Colonel Priddy was accompanied by Captain Talbot.

To the colonel, sentimental posh was obviously embarrassing. In his acidulous voice he inquired of Prune's health, gave him no time for a reply, and went into an obviously rehearsed speech.

The substance of it was that Penning Field was proud of Prune, that the colonel would find some kind of a place —on the ground—for Prune in his Bombardment Group, and that everyone was very, very grateful that Prune had been a hero. Paul and Ernst had been dangerous spies, the colonel declared—all the more dangerous because they had been working from within the ranks of the Army itself for over a year. Prune's utter disregard of personal safety in bringing these spies to capture had been an inspiration to all. Because of this, the colonel concluded somewhat briefly—eager to be done with this posh—he was pleased to award Private Prune with this medal.

As the colonel extended the medal, leaning forward to pin it upon Prune's pajamas, Percival Prune—utterly overwhelmed and with tears in his eyes—tried to find words to express his thanks.

His throat was a lump of emotion as he opened his mouth.

His eyes were wide with horror at the strange words that tumbled from his lips. *Words spoken in a voice other than his own!*

"Take that damned thing away! I don't want it! I won't have it! Clear out of here!"

WHAT followed was a scene that was mercifully blurred to Prune through his own distressed confusion. It was a brief, violent scene, in which Colonel Priddy, followed by Captain Talbot, made a highly indignant exit. It was a scene in which Prune's nurse burst into tears.

But when Prune took his head out from beneath the covers of his bed, he found himself alone with the terrible, thoroughly frightening realization that his malady had not been cured. Not completely, at least.

Tears welled into his sad gray eyes, and he wondered, hopelessly, whose voice he had pre-broadcast this time.

He couldn't, of course, see or hear the scene that was taking place at that moment in a ward some fifteen doors down the corridor from his own. There a gentleman, whose voice and words Prune had fore-spoken—an irate G.I. patient—was using just those words to tell his nurse what to do with the glass of castor oil she wanted him to drink.

5TH WAR LOAN *Buy War Bonds* 5TH WAR LOAN

Why he hated cats was a mystery until Mack told about the girl, the professor, and the feline that didn't have nine lives

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT FUQUA

PROFESSOR THORNDYKE'S MISTAKE

By Sgt. P. F. COSTELLO

IT WAS getting dark when Lefty O'Rourke and I left the smoke-filled little bar where most of Chicago's working newspapermen hang out, and headed back for the office.

Lefty was carrying a fifth of Scotch under his arm with all the zealous care of a mother carrying a two-months-old baby, and I had two roast beef sandwiches stuffed in the outside pocket of my topcoat. These supplies constituted our evening snack and helped to while away the tedious hours of the dogwatch. The sandwiches were for the copy boy.

Lefty glanced at a clock as we passed the Sherman Hotel.

"Holy cats!" he said. "The old man'll——"

He stopped, seeing the look on my face.

"I'm sorry, Mack," he said. "It just slipped out. It won't happen again."

"See that it doesn't," I growled. "You should know better than to mention the word 'cat' in my presence."

"I won't," Lefty said, "but I wish you'd tell me why."

"Maybe there isn't any reason," I said moodily.

"Then you ought to see a psycholo-

Polly and I were doomed to die amid the smoking ruins of the laboratory unless I could hit on some way to free myself from the yards of rope binding my arms behind me

gist," Lefty said. "You've got what they call a phobia. You've been buggy on the subject of cats for as long as I've known you, and that's for over three years."

"It was four years ago," I said. "That's when I started hating cats. It was when——" I stopped and glared at him. "What difference does it make?"

"None at all," Lefty said mildly, "but it sounds like there's a good story behind your feeling about cats. I was just curious, that's all."

We walked to the office in silence. I settled down at my desk and Lefty got some paper containers for the Scotch. We checked the copy from the City Press Bureau and then made a few phone calls to the outlying police stations. The news was quiet, so Lefty poured a round of drinks. I had a couple and then I sat up straight in my chair.

There was a large yellow cat ambling across the floor.

"Who let that animal in here?" I yelled.

Our freckle-faced copy boy stuck his head around the door and said, "One of the girls brought 'im in today."

"Get him out of here," I said, "or I'll feed him into the presses."

"Okay." The boy scooped the cat up under his arm and disappeared.

Lefty looked at me and shook his head slowly.

"You're goin' to go bats," he said, "if you don't stop worrying about cats."

"I don't worry about them," I said, sipping my drink, "I just don't like them. Does a man have to have a logical reason for not liking cats." I finished my drink and Lefty poured another. "A man who *likes* cats," I continued, "is much more in need of a psychologist than a man who doesn't. Why, if I told you the complete story of why I dislike cats you'd——"

"Why don't you," Lefty suggested, pouring me another drink.

I stared for a moment in moody silence at my shoes on the top of the desk. Finally I shoved my hat back on my head and picked up my drink.

"All right," I said, "you asked for it."

So I told Lefty the story. . . .

I WAS pounding a beat for the *Express* four years ago, and Paddy Kane, a slave-driver but a good newspaperman, was city editor. He worked us like mules and accepted no excuse for missing a story.

He called me into his office one day and pointed to an advertisement that had been running for several weeks in the *Express*.

The ad read:

"Cats wanted! Highest prices paid for certain specimens. Contact Professor Thorndyke, 118 Post Road, Elmville, Ill."

He looked at me inquiringly when I had glanced at the ad.

"Well?" he said.

"Somebody wants cats," I said.

"I wonder why," Paddy said.

"Search me," I said. "Maybe it's some sort of scientific research this professor is doing. Or maybe——"

"Let's stop guessing," Paddy said. He leaned back in his chair and fixed his right bright blue eyes on me meaningly. "Let's find out for sure, Mack."

"But this is feature stuff," I said. "I'm a police reporter, Paddy."

"I know," Paddy nodded, "but this is a chance to see what you can do on another line. Get going now. I think there might be an interesting story behind this ad."

ELMVILLE is a little suburb about twenty miles from Chicago and it

took me about forty-five minutes to get there by car. I found 118 Post Road without any trouble. The professor's home was a huge sprawling place set back a couple of hundred yards from the road and boxed by a high iron fence. A drive led up to the big house, which was visible through the trees that dotted the lawn.

I tried the front gate but it was locked. The noise I made brought a caretaker in overalls from a small stone hut on one side of the driveway.

He was a big hulking brute with a couple of days' whiskers on his face, and his eyes looked small and mean. He looked at me without much friendliness.

"Whadda you want?" he growled.

"I want to see Professor Thorndyke," I said, as amiably as I could. "I'm from the *Express* and I'd like to talk to him for a few moments."

"What about?"

"About the cats," I said.

"Have you got some cats?" he asked.

"Well, no," I said, "but——"

The little eyes peered at me suspiciously.

"The professor ain't seein' anybody," he said. "Beat it!"

"Now wait a minute," I said, trying hard to hang onto my patience, "supposing you tell him I'm here and see if he won't change his mind."

"I said, beat it," the caretaker said, moving up to the gate until he was a few feet from me. One hand had slid into his pocket and I saw that there was a hard bulge under the cloth. "Beat it!" he repeated.

He might have had his hand on a pair of pliers or a wire cutter, but I didn't think so. That bulge in his pocket looked like a gun to me, and I didn't intend to hang around and find out definitely.

"Okay," I said and walked back toward the car. He watched me until I got in, then he disappeared back into his stone shack.

I SAT there for a while in the growing darkness, trying to figure things out. The whole darned thing looked pretty suspicious to me, but there might be a perfectly simple explanation to the affair. While I was stewing the matter over in my mind a small coupe pulled up on the opposite side of the street and a red-haired girl got out.

I recognized her with a start of surprise. She was Polly Malone, a feature writer who worked for the *News*. After my first moment of surprise I began to feel the peculiar irritation I always experienced, whenever I met this saucy, carrot-topped creature. She got under my skin—but definitely. I could never figure out why. Maybe it was because she was so cocky and sure of herself. Or it might have been because she treated most of the newspapermen in town like they were stupid clods. Whatever it was, I felt like taking her over my knee and spanking the daylights out of her.

I got out of the car and called to her.

She turned her head at the sound but didn't recognize my voice.

"Who is it?" she said.

"Mack," I said. "What brings you out here?"

"Oh, hello," she said. There was a slightly worried note in her voice. "I might ask you the same question."

"I came out to see Thorndyke," I said, "but it was no soap. He's got a Garbo complex. You've got to have a cat before the caretaker'll let you in."

She patted my cheek with mock solicitude.

"What a pity!" she murmured. "And you didn't have a cat, did you?"

"No," I said grimly, "I didn't."

I was beginning to experience the

usual sensation that a few moments of her company brought about.

"I suppose you thought to tuck one away in your purse," I added sarcastically.

"Go straight to the head of the class, you big smart man," she grinned.

I heard a faint *meow* then as she reached into her car and pulled out a big fluffy Angora. She cradled the cat in her arms and smiled maddeningly at me.

"If you're a nice little lamb," she told me, "I'll tell you all about Professor Thorndye—after your deadline."

I almost strangled trying to think of something to say. I didn't mind so much being scooped—that happens to every newsman—but being scooped by this grinning, red-haired Jezebel was enough to give me a permanent attack of apoplexy.

She smiled sweetly at me and then walked across the street to the iron gate—a slim-legged little girl in a gabardine suit with a yellow cat cuddled in her arms.

I watched hopefully as I saw the burly caretaker emerge from the shadows behind the gate. Maybe she'd get brushed off in spite of the cat. Then it would be my turn to laugh.

But nothing like that happened.

The iron gate creaked open and Polly's slight figure disappeared. I heard the gate close and a heavy lock snap.

I lit a cigarette disgustedly. She'd made it. And Paddy Kane would want to know why I hadn't. I shuddered thinking about what he would say when he saw the story in the *News*.

I went back to the car and finished the cigarette. I was ready to leave then, for there was no point in hanging around on the chance that Polly would break down and give me the story. That little girl wouldn't give her mother a break. She had typewriter ink in her veins and a printer's plate for a heart.

But still I decided to wait a while. I didn't have anything else to do, so I settled down and lit another cigarette. . . .

I FINISHED the pack of cigarettes and started puffing on a pipe a few hours later. The clock on the dashboard said 10:30. Polly, I thought, must be getting a real yarn. I yawned and stretched out as comfortably as possible in the narrow front seat and closed my eyes. I wasn't tired, but I must have dropped off to sleep for, when I opened my eyes again, the hands of the clock stood at 2:25.

"Judas Priest!" I muttered, sitting up straight. Hell, it'd be dawn soon.

My first thought was that I had missed Polly, but I saw that her coupe was still parked on the opposite side of the street. And that brought a worried frown to my forehead.

What was she doing in there so late? I tried telling myself I didn't give a damn what happened to her, and that if she got herself into a mess it would serve her right, but that didn't work. I was still worried.

I got out of the car and walked over to the iron gate. The house was a big bulky black mass through the trees, without a light showing. The iron gate was still locked, but there was no sign of the unpleasant caretaker about.

I tried the gate several times and then gave it up. I walked up and down before the entrance for a few minutes trying to figure out what I should do. If I called the police I might be making a fool of myself. Probably Polly was just worming a good story out of the professor over a pot of tea. That would be like her, I thought bitterly.

Finally I decided the only sensible and cautious thing would be to make a little investigation on my own. That en-

tailed climbing over the high iron fence which wasn't as tough as it looked. I ripped my coat up the back and almost broke a leg, but otherwise it wasn't very hard.

The grounds were completely unlighted and there was no moon, so I bumped into just about every tree and shrub on the place, but eventually I reached the house.

I started up the broad dark front steps, but then I changed my mind and decided to do a little more reconnoitering before I announced myself.

I don't know why I changed my mind. I suppose it was one of those occasions where God was watching over fools, drunkards and reporters—all one species, really.

Instead of banging on the front door I walked around the side of the house and I saw light streaming from a basement window about thirty feet ahead. I pushed through the high coarse grass that surrounded the house until I could bend down and peer into the window. It was so caked with grime and dirt that I had to rub my hand about in a circle to make a clean patch to see through.

Then I stuck my face close to the glass and took a good look. The room I saw was fitted as a laboratory. Beakers of foaming acid were set on regular lab benches against the wall, and a network of glass tubing led from one set of test tubes to the other like a crazy spider web. There was so much smoke drifting in the air that I couldn't, for a while, make out the figures in the room. But then I saw a tall, dark-haired man of about fifty standing beside one of the beakers of acid, peering into its foaming mouth with a crazy sort of smile on his lips.

He was dressed shabbily, but his face was lean and clean-shaven and his eyes seemed unusually bright in the dim illumination of the smoke-filled room.

I looked over, then, to the other side of the room and my heart started pounding faster. Polly was there, but she was bound tightly to a straight-backed chair and there was a white patch of adhesive tape across her mouth. Her face was white and drawn and there was terror in her eyes.

FOR a moment I couldn't think straight. My first impulse was to smash the window in and leap into the room and maybe things would have been better if I'd obeyed that impulse. Instead I tried to think things out calmly. And while I was squatting there, thinking very calmly, I suddenly felt a hard object shoved against my back.

And an unpleasantly harsh voice said, "Don't make a move, or I'll blow you in two."

I started to straighten up instinctively, but the hard cold object suddenly was jammed against my temple.

"I ain't foolin', mister," the harsh voice warned grimly.

I settled back down on my haunches then and didn't make a move while heavy hands went swiftly through my clothes and over my body.

"All right," he said, when the frisk was completed, "stand up and walk ahead of me to the front of the house."

There wasn't anything else I could do, so I obeyed like a good little Boy Scout. When we reached the front of the house my belligerent guard opened the heavy door and shoved me into a small dimly-lit hallway.

I got the first look then at my captor and he turned out to be the thick-shouldered caretaker who had chased me away earlier in the evening.

He recognized me, also.

"Too bad you didn't take my advice," he said grimly.

I looked down at the big gun in his

hands and realized that he spoke the truth. If I had kept my big nose out of this mess I would have been snoozing comfortably in my own little bed instead of playing the lead role in what was apparently going to be a murder drama.

But I thought of Polly then, strapped to a chair in the basement, and I suddenly felt glad I was standing right where I was. I might not be able to help her, but at least I could make a try.

I still didn't know, though, why I wanted to help that little red-haired snip.

My guard motioned to an open door that faced a flight of dark steps, leading downward.

"Down you go," he said, "and no tricks."

I FELT my way down the steps into the dank coolness of a basement, my captor right at my heels. And the gun in his hand was stuck firmly into my back.

"Okay," he said, when we reached the bottom of the steps, "stand right where you are."

He moved away from me, but I had the feeling the gun was still pointing at my back. I heard him fumble at a doorknob and then an oblong of light fell across the floor as he opened a door.

"In here," he said.

I stepped into the laboratory I had seen through the window from the outside of the house. My guard followed me in and slammed the door.

He said to the tall, shabbily dressed man who had turned to the door at my entrance, "I found this guy prowling around outside, boss. He's a reporter. I chased him away a few hours ago, but he's got nose trouble."

I glanced over at Polly. There was a bright look of hope in her eyes, but it faded as she saw the gun the caretaker held at my back. I felt an unreasoning anger at her. She was probably thinking what a hopeless fool I was to allow myself to be caught like a Peeping Tom. What the hell! Did she expect me to arrive with the U.S. Marines? I was glad her mouth was taped.

The tall dark guy in the shabby clothes was regarding me with an amused expression when I turned from Polly.

"How unfortunate for you," he murmured, "that you couldn't control your curiosity."

"What's the idea of this?" I demanded. "Are you Professor Thorndyke?"

He bowed from the waist.

"At your service," he smiled.

"You're getting yourself into a mess of trouble," I said, with a lot of confidence I didn't feel. "Kidnaping is a Federal crime, you know."

"I am aware of that," Professor Thorndyke smiled, "but it doesn't worry me particularly." He glanced over my shoulder and said to the caretaker, "Make out guest comfortable, Peter."

The caretaker put a hand on my shoulder and pulled me down into a chair. He pulled a rope from his pocket and before I realized what he intended doing, my hands were bound securely to the back of the chair. I tugged frantically, but the ropes only bit deeper into my wrists.

The caretaker shoved his gun against my temple.

"Take it easy," he said softly.

I relaxed and glared at Professor Thorndyke.

"You'll never get away with this," I shouted. "Our editors are expecting us back. They knew where we were going, and they'll send a riot squad out here if we aren't back by tomorrow morning."

"Precisely," Professor Thorndyke

nodded agreeably. "And the diligent representatives from the police department will find you here when they arrive —but—" he paused and allowed the silence to gather ominously "—they won't find either of you in a very talkative mood. You will both be dead."

I TRIED to tell myself he was bluffing, but there was something in his deliberately cold voice that warned me he wasn't. The professor meant exactly what he was saying. I felt an unpleasant shudder run down my spine.

"Why do you want to kill us?" I asked. "You haven't got anything against us personally. You never saw either of us until tonight."

"That is correct," the professor said calmly. His large glowing eyes were touched with a glint of sardonic amusement. "Nevertheless you both must die. There is, as you mention, nothing personal in my decision. In a sense I regret having to kill you, but since it is inevitable, I am not wasting time in idle lamentations. Within a very short while you will both be dead. I am sincerely sorry for you. I would hate to be in your place. There is nothing on this Earth more wonderful than life. I have devoted twenty years of scientific study to the problems of life and death, and with each passing year my horror of death and my love of life have grown proportionately. The thought of death fills me with dread; and the thought of endless life brings me an ecstasy that is almost too sweet for my brain to endure!"

I was watching his eyes as he talked and I didn't like the wild gleam I saw there. He looked like a prime candidate for a strait jacket, in my opinion.

I tried to be soothing.

"Well," I said, "nobody lives forever. Death isn't so terrible if you figure that the smartest men in the world have never been able to figure a way around it."

"You are right," the professor said in an odd voice. "The smartest men in the world have failed, but I, Professor Thorndyke, have succeeded."

"You what?" I said. I knew what the professor meant and I knew he was cracked as the Liberty Bell; but I was trying to stall for time.

"I have succeeded where the greatest minds of the world have failed," Professor Thorndyke said in the same strained, odd voice. He wasn't looking at me any longer. His bright gleaming eyes were fixed on the ceiling and his powerful hands were clenched at his sides.

"I have beaten death!" he cried. "I have pried from the lost lore of antiquity the secret of immortal life. The secret is mine and the power it gives me will be mine to use as I see fit."

"You're crazy!" I yelled. I couldn't help it. Listening to him rant was more than I could take. I regretted my tactlessness before the words had stopped echoing. But strangely enough they didn't seem to bother the professor.

"Whether you believe me or not," he said good-naturedly, "makes not the slightest difference." His mood of fanatic enthusiasm had passed and he seemed almost pleasantly contented.

He smiled over my head to the caretaker, Peter.

"I think it is about time for the last step, Peter," he said quietly. "Make the necessary preparations, will you, please?"

Peter nodded silently and left the room.

I felt a bead of sweat breaking on my forehead. The final act, whatever it was, seemed to be ready to start.

"Now just a minute," I said desperately. "You can't murder two human beings without any reason or explana-

tion. There's no sense to it!"

"But I have excellent reasons," the professor said blandly. "You see, I must prevent your speaking of what you have seen tonight, and there is only one way to make sure of that. Therefore," he shrugged casually, "you must die."

HE TURNED away from me and picked up a large hypodermic syringe from the laboratory table. It was filled with a murky yellow fluid. He rolled up his sleeve and plunged the hypodermic needle into his arm and slowly squeezed the plunger. When the glass cylinder was empty he withdrew the hypodermic and replaced it on the table; then he rolled down his sleeve.

"And that," he said in a low voice, "is the climax of my thirty years of labor."

He turned to me and bowed mockingly.

"*Au revoir*, my inquisitive friend," he murmured. "We shall not meet again."

And with that cryptic remark he left the room and closed the door behind him. I heard a bolt slide shut. And that was all. I was still as completely in the dark as I'd been when I stumbled into the laboratory room an hour before.

I looked at Polly. She was squirming helplessly in her bonds and the adhesive gag over her mouth was twisting about with the effort she was making to speak.

"Well," I said sourly, "this is certainly a fine mess you got us into. If you hadn't been so ultra smart and brought a cat along to grease your way into this place, we wouldn't be in this spot now."

She made a wheezing, choking sound behind the gag and glared at me angrily.

"One of the shrewdest things you've ever said," I nodded. "You've no idea how a gag raises the general level of your conversation."

She made another inarticulate sound and stamped both of her small feet on the floor. She had to stamp them in unison because her ankles were bound tightly together.

"Save your energy, honey chile," I told her. "Fortunately I can't hear a word you're saying. We'll just have to sit tight until someone——"

I stopped talking as I saw she wasn't looking at me anymore. Her eyes had shifted to the door and there was an expression of terror on her face.

I squirmed around in my chair and saw that slim tendrils of smoke were crawling under the crack of the door. The sight brought a most unpleasant sensation to my stomach. As if a cold hand on my insides had suddenly tightened into a fist.

The smoke crawled up in steadily thickening coils and there was a funny noise in my ears, like someone was frying eggs in the room. Then I saw an orange flicker of flame curling up the edge of the door. The door was wood, dry, unpainted, and the rest of the room was in the same condition. A fire trap. The smoke was billowing into the room now in heavy, suffocating layers, and the crackle of fire had crescendoed into a blazing roar. More greedy fire appeared at the edges of the door and leaped hungrily for the dry ceiling and ran along the walls.

This looked like curtains for us. I glanced at Polly. She was still staring in fascination at the climbing flames; but, to give her credit, she didn't seem frightened.

I was within two feet of the door and the heat on my back was becoming uncomfortable. And that gave me an idea. My legs weren't tied, so by putting both feet on the floor and shoving hard I was able to slide the chair back to the door. The hairs on my neck crackled with the heat, but my bound wrists were within reach of the flames.

POLLY was staring at me in amazement as I jammed my hands against the burning edge of the door; but then she saw my purpose and her eyes became hopeful.

The sleeves of my coat started to char and the ropes began to burn; something else was burning too, but I sank my chin into my chest and clamped my jaw shut and hung on.

I tugged at the ropes, but they held like handcuffs. It was getting harder to breathe. The room was so full of smoke that Polly was just a blurred figure across the room. I took a deep breath and put everything I had into a last effort. The burning ropes bit into my wrists for an agonizing instant—and then they snapped!

I struggled to my feet, shook the ropes from my wrists and lurched across the room to Polly. I cut her loose from the chair but here was no time to untie her hands and feet, so I slung her onto my shoulder and started for the window on the opposite side of the room.

Half-way there, Polly started kicking like a mule and squirming about on my shoulder like a Mexican jumping bean. I thought she was strangling, so I eased her down to the floor where it wasn't quite so smoky, and pulled the adhesive tape away from her mouth.

She gulped a mouthful of air gratefully.

"Angel," she gasped, "I——"

"Shut up!" I said. "This is no time for endearments. We've got to get——"

"But, Angel," she cried, "you——"

"If you want to call me cute names," I said, "that's okay. But we aren't going to sit here in a burning building and whisper sweet nothings to each other."

I started to lift her in my arms but she kicked me in the stomach with her high-heeled, sharply-pointed shoes.

"You conceited egoist!" she yelped shrilly. "I'm not calling you sweet names. I'm trying to tell you we can't leave without Angel."

"Who the hell is Angel?" I snarled.

"My cat," she said, coughing out smoke. "She's in a cage under the laboratory bench. I won't leave without her."

I dumped her on the floor—and not gently.

"Okay," I yelled, "then stay right where you are! And I hope you and Angel have a gay old time."

I leaped to my feet and started for the window. I was bluffing of course, but I wanted her to call me back. Maybe it was silly and childish, but that girl got under my skin until I wanted to scream. I wanted her to know she was wrong and I wanted to dent her cocksure attitude if it was the last thing I ever did.

But she didn't call me back. I turned and saw that she was sitting just where I'd left her, hands and feet bound, in the middle of an inferno—and the little imp was gazing about as unconcernedly as if she were in an art gallery.

"Oh hell!" I groaned.

She glanced at me coolly.

"I thought you were leaving," she said.

I DASHED across the room and peered under the lab bench. I heard Angel before I saw her. She was meowing plaintively and then I saw her. She was sitting in a little wire cage, a terrified ball of yellow fluff.

I grabbed the cage and ran back across the smoke-filled room to Polly's side.

"Here's your cat," I snarled. "Now let's get out of here."

"Poor Angel," Polly cried. "Is muvver's ittle baby frightened?"

I gagged. "Stop it," I said hoarsely. "I have a weak stomach."

I shoved a table under the window,

climbed onto it and smashed the glass pane with my fist. The draft of cool air that blew into my face must have come directly from Heaven.

Angel went first. I tossed the cage out the window and prayed it would fall into a well. A nice deep one.

Then I went back and got Polly. I hoisted her onto the table and from there I was able to roll her out the window onto the grass. When I clambered out, the room was a roaring mass of fire. We hadn't been a second too soon.

I untied Polly and helped her to her feet. Her arms and legs were so cramped she could hardly move, and I was in pretty bad shape myself. My wrists were burned almost raw.

But Polly's first question was:

"Where is Angel?"

I picked up Angel's cage with a sigh.

"Here's your precious Angel," I said sourly. "Now let's get out of here before the house falls on us. Not that I care for myself," I added sarcastically, "but we must think of Angel."

"That's right," Polly said.

The fire department was on hand when we reached the street. Also the police. I introduced myself to the captain.

"There's a couple of men you want in that house," I told him. I looked back at the huge mansion. It was completely enveloped in flames. "But I think this fire is going to save you a job."

"The job's over," the captain said. "We met the two men you mentioned as they were leaving. We ordered them to stop and the tall guy in the baggy clothes pulled a gun and started firing. He seemed awfully surprised when he went down with about six slugs in him."

Polly was listening with both ears at a point.

"Are you sure he's dead?" she demanded.

"Certain," the captain said.

She turned to me entreatingly.

"Please, Mack," she said, "get me to a phone. I've got a story that can't keep."

"I'm a reporter too," I said.

"Oh, please, Mack," she said imploringly. She looked up at me with big, pleading eyes. "Give me a break now, and I swear I'll make it up to you. I've never had a story like this in my life."

"Okay," I sighed.

We got in the car and drove to a drug store. I got a couple of slugs and went to the phone booth. I handed Polly one of the slugs.

"Go ahead," I said. "You've got the story. I haven't the faintest idea of what the professor was up to."

"But I have," Polly smiled, "and what a yarn it is. It's the kind of story no man would ever get."

SHE stepped into the phone booth and reached for the slug slot, but her hand faltered and the slug slipped from her fingers.

"Oh darn," she said helplessly. She turned to me and said, "You'll have to help me, Mack. My arms are so cramped I can't lift them over my head. Will you get my number for me, please?"

"Sure thing," I said.

I went into the booth and my shoulder was between her and the phone while I dialed. When a voice answered I said, "Give me re-write. This is hot."

Then I moved aside and let Polly put her mouth to the receiver.

"Go ahead," I said. "They're waiting for you."

"Get this straight and fast," she spoke crisply into the receiver. "The police have just shot and killed Professor Thorndyke and his assistant, Peter Veler, of 118 Post Road, Elmville, Illinois. The professor had been conduct-

ing experiments in prolonging human life. For several weeks he has been advertising in the local papers for cats. I went out there, got in to see him by bringing a cat with me. The professor examined my cat, Angel, and then ordered his assistant, Peter Veler, to see that I didn't leave. Veler bound me to a chair in the laboratory and then Professor Thorndyke told me his story. Are you getting all this?"

Polly's voice was sharp with excitement.

"Don't interrupt," she said. "Just take this down and don't forget my byline. Who is this? Are you crazy? This is Polly. Now stop interrupting. The professor told me that he spent thirty years tracing down the legend that cats have nine lives. He studied in Persia, India, all over the world I guess. And, according to him, he found an actual scientific basis to that superstition. Some alchemist in the Ninth Century had perfected a formula which could transfer to humans the quality of longevity that cats possess. And here's the absolute pay-off. The professor needed a special type of cat to test his theory and my cat, Angel, was just the one he wanted. That's why he wouldn't let me leave. How did I get out? Well Mack from the *Express* happened to stumble in after the professor had completed his experiment on Angel. Then the professor fired the house and left us there to die. But Mack got loose and saved us both. He's been an absolute honey, so mention his name in the story. Now that's about all. The police shot the professor and Veler while they were trying to get away. Send that right through. I'll have a follow-up story when I get to the office. Yeah. Goodbye."

I hung up the phone for Polly and we went up to the fountain to get a coke.

"Was all that one the level?" I asked her uneasily as we climbed on stools.

Polly nodded emphatically. "The professor was sure that he'd have nine lives to live after he injected his serum into his arm. And," she said thoughtfully, "I think he was on the level. I don't think he was just a crack-pot."

"You mean that mularkey about nine lives?" I asked. "If he was on the level why didn't it work? You heard the captain say he was dead as a doornail. According to his theory, he should still have eight lives to go."

Polly sipped her coke deliberately.

"I think he made one mistake," she said. "Angel is a pretty active cat and she's been in a lot of trouble." She looked up at me and said seriously, "I think Angel had already used up eight of her lives when the professor got to her. So instead of having eight lives he only had one. That was Professor Thorndyke's mistake."

"Well," I said, "everybody makes mistakes."

"I don't think so," she said. "Anyone who can use his head won't make mistakes."

I looked at her with a slow smile. Her chin was tilted in the air and her pert features wore their slightly maddening expression of calm confidence. I almost regretted what I had to do.

"Maybe you're right," I said, stirring my straw around in the coke, "but using your head won't always keep you out of trouble. Sometimes," I said slowly, "being able to use your arms will keep a person from making mistakes."

"What do you mean?" she asked, puzzled. She saw the smile on my face and she began to look slightly uneasy. "Mack, what do you mean?"

She glanced worriedly at the phone booth and then back at me.

"I don't get you, Mack," she said.

Her confidence was fading fast. She chewed nervously on her lower lip. And

then slowly, a look of horrified certainty appeared on her face.

"Mack," she cried. "you didn't! No one could be that low."

I turned on the stool and faced her, a happy smile on my face. This was my moment.

"Honey," I said gently, "I can be as low as necessary. I didn't dial your office. I dialed the *Express*. You told your very interesting story to Paddy Kane, the editor of the *Express*. And it's on its way to the stands by this time."

LEFTY whistled admiringly when I stopped talking. He poured me another glass of Scotch.

"You sure got reason to hate cats, Mack," he said. "An experience like that'd sour anybody on 'em."

"Oh, it wasn't that so much," I said moodily. I got up and put my hat on and yawned. "The thing that gets me was that Polly was wrong about Angel being down to her ninth life." I lit a cigarette disgustedly. "Hell, that cat still has eight to go, I'll bet."

I walked toward the door with the cigarette hanging from my mouth.

I stopped in the doorway and looked back at Lefty.

"Do you realize what that means?" I demanded. "I'll be takin' care of Angel for the next fifty years."

"Well," Lefty grinned, "you got something out of the deal besides Angel. Give my best to Polly when you get home, will you?"

"I'll do that," I said.

The Electron Gun

By CPL. KING KEILLOR

This is the "gun" with which we will "see" when war is done! It fires the electrons that make television broadcasts a reality

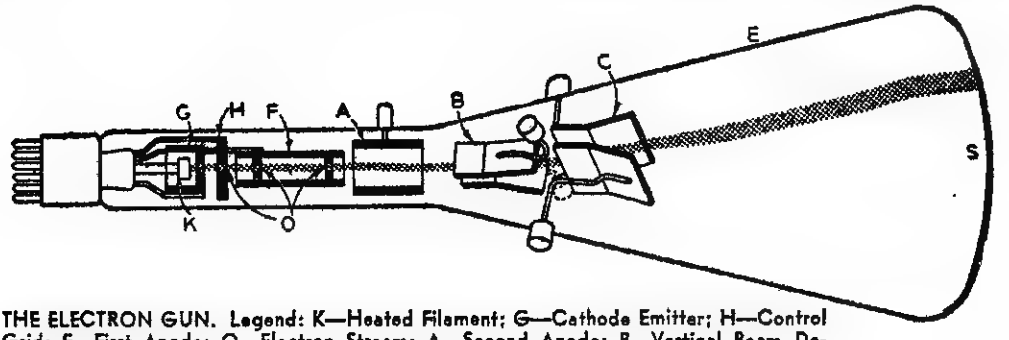
THE electron gun is a device the world will hear a great deal about in the not-too-distant future, when our modern home is equipped with the 19?? Table Model Televiso; price $179, FOB Waterbury, Connecticut.

When we get our new television set, curiosity will be sure to get the better of us and off will come the rear cover so we can look into the maze of tubes, wires and coils that make up the set. Conspicuously emerging from the conglomeration of electronic gadgets, and pointing toward the viewing screen where we watch the facial antics of our favorite television comic, we will notice a large glass vacuum tube which we will know to be the very heart of our television set. This tube houses the electron gun, which, in turn, is the gadget that makes television and many other modern miracles possible. The tube, the high-pressure salesman has told us, is the most advanced model of the kinescope, complete with a 100 Foot-Lambert brightness control, and dixonac-coated second anode.

The high-sounding terminology used by the salesman won't faze us a bit, for we'll talk back to him in the same language, because by then we will have a clear understanding of such devices as the electron gun, which is really a simple affair.

We mustn't be misled by the name of the device, for it is not a Jap-slaughtering machine, though it has a definite place in the war we are fighting. The "gun" projects a stream of electrons which writes out a picture in a manner analogous to a pencil moving along a sheet of paper. In other words, this stream of electrons emitted from the gun is "The moving finger, that having writ, moves on." The "writing" done by the fast-moving electron stream is the picture we see on our television viewing screen.

That's about what television boils down to, although there are a few additional details of the process which we won't attempt to cover at one sitting. What we can examine is the electron gun mechanism which we can see clearly without racing our mental motors too much. The basic structure of the Gun is shown in the diagram below:



THE ELECTRON GUN. Legend: K—Heated Filament; G—Cathode Emitter; H—Control Grid; F—First Anode; O—Electron Stream; A—Second Anode; B—Vertical Beam Deflection Plates; C—Horizontal Deflection Plates; E—Tube; S—Fluorescent Screen

In the accompanying diagram of an electron gun is a cathode ray tube. We see electrons being shot out from the cathode emitter, after which they travel the length of the tube to strike the fluorescent screen on the right. As they strike the screen they cause the material coating the inside surface of the glass to glow, producing an effect visible to the eye.

What actually happens, taking the process from left to right, is this: the heated filament has a current of electricity running through it, causing the wire to become hot, in the same way the filament in a light bulb heats up. This filament is coated with a substance called the cathode emitter, which has the property of emitting a great number of electrons from its surface when it is heated. These electrons, being of negative potential, will be attracted to a positive object, and will be repelled by a negatively charged object, depending on the strength of the charged objects nearby. From this we can gather that the electrons now travelling free in the evacuated space can be pushed or pulled in any direction merely by placing positive or negative charged objects near the cathode emitter; which is exactly what happens in the electron gun.

The first charged object having an effect on the electron stream is the control grid. This has a *weak* negative charge, and so will tend to repel electrons back to the cathode emitter, *but* many electrons will get past this control grid through the *hole* in its center because the next element, the first anode, has a very strong *positive* charge. The first anode *attracts* the electrons with a force which overcomes the weaker negative charge of the control grid. So the electrons move farther and through the *hole* in the first anode, and are attracted and accelerated by the second anode, which also has a very strong positive attraction for the free electrons.

Now the speeding electrons again pass through a hole in the center of the second anode, and, carried on by the force of their own momentum, shot clear to the fluorescent screen at the end of the tube.

Summing up the movement, we may consider the electrons as starting from the cathode emitter, and then being given acceleration and direction by the attractive force of the anode. The control grid is merely a variable negative charge which lets *more* or *less* electrons get by, thus determining the number of electrons that strike the screen, or the intensity of the glow.

The vertical and horizontal deflection plates are used to *deflect* the stream in one direction or another, so the pencil stream draws the required glowing picture on the screen. These plates have a deflective force by virtue of varying positive or negative charges being placed on them, and as the electron stream passes between plates it is pushed or pulled into a slight deviation from its path. What actually shows on the screen is a traced pattern that performs all kinds of gyrations, according to the charges placed on the tube elements. By controlling the charges we can actually cause the electron stream to move in predetermined patterns for us.

There in a nutshell is the secret of television, the latest great accomplishment of the mind of man. With some slight modifications when applied to the television tubes, what we do is simply use an electron gun as a pencil to draw pictures photographed at some distant point.

That's what we will think of as we turn our awesome gaze into our brand new television set and wonder what parts we can touch to get our fingers burned. Of course that is only the story of the electron gun, and not the complete explanation of television. If you want to learn more about this fascinating phenomena, just dig into some of these books:

TELEVISION—ZWORYKIN & MORTON—Publisher, Wiley & Sons

Elements of Radio—Marcus and Horton—Publisher, Prentice-Hall.

Radio Physics—Alfred M. Ghirardi.

The End

"Herkies was making dolls! And when he makes dolls . . ."

DOLLS OF DEATH

By Pvt. E. K. JARVIS

ILLUSTRATED BY MAGARIAN

"EASY, old man," John Garth said. "Easy does it. Easy now."

Garth had just answered a ring at the door. Winkles had sagged into his arms. Winkles was a thin, nondescript little man, with owl-like eyes that seemed never to be quite in focus. You saw hundreds like him on the streets any day, clerks, bookkeepers, salesmen in ladies' shoes. Nobody ever looked twice at Winkles. He wanted it that way.

Winkles would have fallen if Garth had not held him up, helped him across the room to the couch. Garth was not much bigger than Winkles but he was more wiry, somehow more alert. He gave the impression that he was always coasting, that he had reserve power if he needed it. You looked twice at Garth. There was something about him that made you do it.

This same something made him what he was, a sort of second Harry Houdini. Unlike Houdini, Garth was a rich man. As a youngster, the feats of the master magician had fascinated him; what Houdini had done, Garth had tried to do. He had been amazingly successful. And like Houdini, Garth had eventually arrived at the investigation of alleged occult phenomena, spiritualists, mediums, crystal gazers, fortune tellers. This was a trail that had led him into strange by-paths. Ninety-nine per cent of all fortune tellers were fakes, he was convinced. But what about the one per cent who somehow or other seemed to hit the truth more often than they missed, who seemed to make contact with hidden forces?

The investigation of this one per cent was the supreme interest in John Garth's life. There were, in Chicago, nine other persons who, with Garth, formed a group devoted to the investigation of occult phenomena.

Winkles was one of this group.

Winkles sagged down on the couch and didn't move, except to fall backward. His face and lips were blue, his eyes were rolled back almost out of sight, and his breath was a rasping rattle deep in his throat. Garth's movements were leisurely. He seemed to be in no hurry at all, but only a stopwatch

There was no doubt that Herkles was a trickster and a fraud—but when he made dolls, that was something else

would have revealed how quickly he stripped off Winkles' coat and shirt. There was no waste motion in his movements. He saw what had to be done and did it. He looked at Winkles' chest, turned him over and looked at his back. No wound was visible. Still moving with that deceptive leisureness that was a part of everything he did, he laid Winkles back on the couch, walked into the hall and picked up the telephone.

He knew there was a doctor two blocks away. Somewhere in the back of his capacious memory he had stored away this bit of information, against the time when it would be needed. It was needed now, and his memory, moving with the same deceptive speed that characterized Garth, supplied the number to him by the time he had picked up the phone.

"Doctor Hersey? John Garth, apartment 201, 3111 Eastgate Avenue, speaking. Come to my apartment at once, if you please. This is an emergency. Thank you."

AS HE hung up the phone, assured that the physician would be along as soon as possible, he heard the lock click on the front door. His right hand went inside his coat at the sound, but he didn't draw the gun. He knew who had clicked the lock on the door. How had she known, he wondered. How had she known?

She always knew!

Few things ever surprised John Garth. Patricia Rohm always surprised him. Officially his secretary, she occupied the apartment across the hall. Garth was immensely attracted to her. She was a medium. If it seems odd that a man who's chief occupation was exposing mediums should have one for his secretary, let it be stated that Patricia Rohm represented the one per cent that so attracted Garth. She was the one in a hundred who was completely honest yet she seemed, from time to time, in flashes of intuition, to be able to foresee the shape of things to come. Somewhere. somehow, her mind made contact with vast mysteries.

Garth heard her step sound in the living room. There was a low cry. By the time he reached the room, she was kneeling beside Winkles.

She looked up at him, gray eyes in a pale face, gray eyes that seemed to look into vast infinities, gray eyes that now were filled with shock and pain.

"When I entered, I thought it was you!" she said.

Garth knew what she meant. The knowledge sent an electric surge through his heart. He wasted a split second smiling at her, but no more than that. Then he was all business again. His business was keeping Winkles alive, if he could.

He and Patricia Rohm made a team. He massaged Winkles' hands. She went for the brandy. While he dribbled the liquid into the man's mouth drop by drop, she took over the massaging. Neither told the other what to do. Each seemed to do the right thing intuitively. Patricia Rohm asked no questions. She accepted the fact of Winkles' presence, did not try to find out how he had gotten to Garth's apartment, what he had been doing, or what had happened to him. The answer to those questions would come later. Garth in his turn did not ask why she had chosen this particular time to come to his apartment. Garth knew there was no answer to that question, or no satisfactory answer. She knew. She always knew when she was needed, when he was in danger. Her apartment was across the hall. She had not seen Winkles enter, she had not heard him come into the building. But the sec-

ond he had sagged into Garth's arms, she had known he was there.

Winkles sat up on the divan. A little of the blue color had gone from his face as though somewhere a pressure had been relaxed. His lips had whitened and his eyes were wild.

"Dolls!" he whispered.

Patricia Rohm seemed to shrink in upon herself at the word.

Garth blinked. "Dolls?" he questioned, seemingly to himself. "What is this about dolls, Winkles, old man?"

Winkles didn't hear the question. His eyes were focused on some spot far away. "Dolls!" he whispered. "Dozens of them, hundreds of them, thousands of them—and all of them alive." Fear cut lines in his face as he spoke.

"Easy," Garth said soothingly. "Where are you hurt, Winkles?"

Winkles did not answer.

"What happened to you?" Garth asked.

Winkles did not seem to hear the question. His owl-like eyes looked away into some vast infinity. "Dolls," he whispered. "Dancing dolls—"

"Winkles!" Garth said sharply. Somehow he had to penetrate to the man's clouded mind, somehow he had to make Winkles pay attention to his questions. "Listen to me. Where are you hurt?" His voice was as sharp as the crack of a whip.

Winkles looked like an owl caught in the daylight, blinded, unseeing.

Smack!

GARTH'S hand left a white mark on the man's cheek. Winkles shuddered, cringed, turned a startled face toward Garth. His eyes came into focus.

"Hello, Garth," he muttered. "How did you get here?"

"What happened to you?"

"What happened to me?" Winkles echoed. "Why, nothing. Nothing. I heard a story about a doll. Thought you would be interested. It was such a strange story! Right in your line. I went to investigate—" His voice limped into silence.

"Where are you hurt?" Garth demanded.

"I'm not hurt," Winkles said. "I'm perfectly all right. I'm as good as I ever was. Garth, you will like this story. It's a good one. Dolls—"

He was gone again, his mind slipping from the present to the past. A film rolled over his eyes and again he was seeing something that he had seen before. There was terror on his face, and a kind of sick horror. Garth slapped him but this time the slap had no effect.

The door bell rang.

"Doctor," Garth said without looking up. Patricia Rohm opened the door. A middle-aged roly-poly man entered. He had a black bag in one hand and he was panting.

"Came as quickly as I could. What is it? What's wrong? Ah—" He saw Winkles.

Garth moved away and the physician bent over the man on the couch. He didn't say anything and his face showed nothing.

"Is it that bad?" Garth asked. He was watching the doctor's face.

"I don't know," the physician answered. "Heart attack, I think. What happened prior to the seizure?"

Garth shook his head. "I don't know. He rang the bell and when I answered, he fell into the room."

"Ah! Do you know him?"

"Yes. He's a friend of mine."

FOR a second the physician stared thoughtfully at Garth, then abruptly turned his attention back to the man

on the couch. Winkles had fallen back and was breathing heavily, the ribs of his bare chest standing out plainly as he struggled for air. The physician forced back the eyelids, studied the pupils, then reached with one hand for his bag and pulled out a stethescope. For an instant he listened to the pound of the heart. Then he ripped off the stethescope and dived again into his bag.

His hands were moving rapidly now, his movements hurried, as if he was fighting against time. He jerked a hypodermic syringe from its case, fitted a needle to it, reached for an ampoule. Winkles was breathing raucously, in great gasping sobs, every breath an agony of effort. Suddenly he sat up straight.

His eyes darted around the room, fixed themselves on Garth.

"Garth," he whispered.

The physician, working like a madman, was making the last adjustment of the hypodermic.

"Garth," Winkles' voice was almost a wail. "Herkles—Herkles is making dolls."

He sighed gently, the tension seemed to go out of him, and like a child overcome by sleep, he laid down on the couch.

The doctor looked quickly at him. Then he sighed. Without saying a word, he took the syringe apart and slipped it carefully back into its carrying case.

"Oh," Patricia Rohm said. And then, "Oh," again, in a small, weak voice. She moved to Garth and he put his arm around her.

The physician rose to his feet. He looked at the girl and at Garth, then lighted a cigarette. "That's that," he said.

Garth swallowed.

Winkles was dead.

CHAPTER II

The Search for Herkles

"HERKLES is making dolls!" Garth said.

The doctor had gone. The men from the undertaking establishment had come and gone, taking with them all that was mortal of Winkles. There would be an autopsy. The doctor had thought Winkles had died of a heart attack, but he hadn't been sure of the cause of death, hence the autopsy.

"Herkles—" Garth repeated. Winkles, saying that Herkles was making dolls, would have been talking nonsense except for the fact that Garth knew a man by that name, a fake fortune teller and medium whose pretended seances had been contrived to lure cash from the pockets of a credulous but wealthy clientele he had somehow managed to build up. Garth had exposed him, and Herkles, enraged, had promised revenge. The threat meant nothing to Garth, even though he knew Herkles was crafty, bitter, and dangerous. But —Herkles was making dolls! What had Winkles discovered?

Garth glanced at Patricia Rohm. She was seated in a soft chair, and, as he paced nervously back and forth across the room, her eyes had never left his face. She stirred, spoke.

"You will go after him?"

"Of course," Garth said. "It is obvious that he has contrived some new kind of trickery and is practicing it somewhere here in Chicago. Winkles stumbled on to it. Yes, I will go after him. The man is a dangerous fraud."

"Must you?" the girl asked.

"Certainly," Garth answered. "My dear, you know how these tricksters prey on the minds and the hearts of credulous persons. Herkles must be found, and stopped."

The girl's face paled as he spoke. "Can't you just forget about him?" she asked quickly. "Can't we—you—go off somewhere and ignore Herkles? Can't you leave him alone, this time?"

She was pleading with Garth, urging him, for some hidden reason of her own, to forget all about Herkles. Garth stared in astonishment at her. Why should she ask him to forget about Herkles? Why should she urge him to leave the faker alone?

"My dear—"

"Just this once!" she begged.

"Why?" Garth asked.

She didn't want to answer that question. Her reluctance showed on her face. She slumped back in the chair, buried her face in her hands. "Please don't ask me why," she begged.

"My dear, I must ask you why," Garth said gently.

"No!"

"But I have to know. If you have some reason why I should not go after Herkles, I am willing to listen, but—"

"Just leave him alone. Ignore him. Forget about him."

There was a note of urgency in her voice. Garth looked at her, studied her face. She tried to avoid his gaze.

"Why?" he said.

"Because—" There was a second of silence, then the words came with a rush. "Because Mr. Winkles was murdered, that's why. He didn't die of a heart attack. He was killed, murdered, right here in this room. Herkles killed him. That's why I want you to leave Herkles alone, because he is dangerous, deadly, because he has something new and it isn't a fake—"

She was on the verge of hysteria.

THE words rocked Garth. Winkles —murdered! Herkles a murderer! The reason why she wanted him to leave Herkles alone was now obvious: she was afraid, if he went after Herkles, he would be killed.

"Are you certain Winkles was murdered?" Garth demanded.

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I—just know. As soon as I saw him, I knew. Don't ask me to explain. I can't tell you how I know. But—he was murdered."

Garth did not doubt her. Even though the words shocked him to the bottom of his soul, he knew that one of those moments of intuition was on her, that somehow she had made contact with hidden truth.

"How was Winkles killed?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Was he poisoned?"

"I—I don't think so, but—but I don't know."

"Why was he killed?"

"I think—I think—because he had discovered something. I'm not certain about this. I can't—can't quite reach the truth. I almost get it, then something blocks me off—"

She was answering in a monotone, her face white and tense, her eyes far away. Garth did not press her to answer when she could not. He knew that a certain harsh strain accompanied these moments of intuition, that a few seconds of insight would leave her mentally exhausted, that she would slump down in the chair and not be able to speak at all if he demanded that she answer. She was trying, trying desperately. She might be able to tell him what he wanted to know, she might not. Her second sense worked that way. Like a telephone conversation through a poor connection, sometimes the words would get through, sometimes they wouldn't. Or, keeping the simile of the telephone, someone else might come on to the line, in which case her an-

swers would be entirely irrelevant. Garth always had the suspicion that a whole new field of communication was dimly revealed in these seances, that here nature gave a hint that might enable an inquiring mind to make tremendous discoveries, if only the hint could be followed up and correctly interpreted. The catch was, the hint insisted on remaining only a hint, nothing more.

"Try, Pat," Garth urged gently "Why was Winkles killed?"

"I'm trying," she answered. "No . . . no . . . " She was looking far away, her eyes out of focus as if they peered into dim infinities. Sitting up very straight in the chair, she was obviously trying hard. But no matter how much she tried, she couldn't seem to get through. Somewhere the connection was bad. Suddenly she slumped down in the chair. "That's all," she whispered. "All . . . danger . . . Herkles . . . The two are connected . . . but I can't get any more. . . ."

Garth did not urge her further. She had already told him enough. Winkles had been murdered! Winkles, that shy, timid, obscure but exceedingly courageous little man who had spent most of his life digging into strange mysteries, had finally explored one mystery too many.

"Herkles—is making dolls!" Garth thought. What had Winkles discovered? He looked at Patricia Rohm, hoping somehow that she would be able to explain what Winkles had meant by his strange double talk about dolls. She shook her head. The statement meant nothing to her either, nor was her intuitive ability to grasp the truth of any help. She just didn't know what Winkles had meant.

"There is only one way to find the answer," Garth mused. "And that is —to find Herkles."

Find Herkles! It was easy to say but he knew that it might be impossible to do. To find one man among the millions living in Chicago. And Herkles might not even be in Chicago. He might be in any of the dozens of suburbs. There was no way of knowing where he was. But—he had to be found! The problem, difficult as it was, had to be tackled. Garth put on his hat.

"What are you going to do?" Patricia asked.

"I'm going to contact the Circle," Garth answered. "Some of them may know something. Somebody may have seen Herkles, or heard something about him."

The Circle was the name given to the group to which Garth belonged, and to which Winkles had belonged, that strange little club of mystics and seekers after truth. Some member of the Circle might know something.

Garth saw Patricia to her own apartment, then went out into the night.

FROM a pay station in the Loop, Garth called, one by one, the eight other members of the Circle. One was a banker, a rich and powerful figure in the financial world, one was an auditor, one owned a tiny restaurant on the South Side, two were clerks, and three were women. Some were wealthy, some very poor. Winkles had been one of them. Now they learned that Winkles would be one of them no longer. They were silent when Garth told them what had happened to Winkles.

"Damn it, Garth," the banker growled. "Old Winkles done for. By gad, Garth—"

"He died in my apartment, babbling about a man named Herkles, who makes dolls," Garth said.

"Eh? What's that? A man who makes dolls!" There was a startled note in the voice at the other end of the wire.

"Winkles was murdered," Garth said.

"Oh, nonsense! I beg your pardon. I mean—are you sure?"

"Pat said he was murdered," Garth answered. This banker knew Patricia Rohm. The tone of his voice showed that he was not inclined to dispute anything she said.

"Have you heard anything about a man named Herkles, who makes dolls?" Garth asked.

"No, I'm afraid I haven't. There was one thing—but that's impossible."

"What's impossible?"

"Oh, it's nothing," the banker insisted. "I noticed a week or so ago that my daughter was wearing an odd little piece of costume jewelry, a tiny doll made out of some kind of plastic. I was struck by it because it resembled her so much, as if she had posed for it, or something. I asked her about it and she said she *had* posed for it, that the artist had made it especially for her. She said it was a fad, that all the girls were doing it. Of course it doesn't mean anything—"

Garth's heart jumped. A figurine made to resemble a living person, a doll! Garth knew that a whole field of magic was based on the use of dolls. Many primitive peoples believed that if you made a doll of your enemy, incorporated in it something your enemy had worn, a piece of cloth that had been it contact with his body, parings from his fingernails, his spittle, even, you would have control of the person whom the doll represented. If you thrust a pin into the doll, your enemy would be stuck by a pin; if you tied a string around the doll's throat and gradually tightened the pressure, your enemy would choke to death.

Had this been what Winkles meant when he babbled that Herkles was making dolls? Was it possible? This was Chicago, in the Twentieth Century. Doll magic belonged to primitive peoples, to credulous persons who had little or no knowledge of the operation of scientific laws. Doll magic could not be operating in Chicago now!

Or could it?

Winkles had babbled of dolls, and babbling, had died.

Garth was silent. The man at the other end of the wire misinterpreted his silence. "Garth! You don't mean—my daughter—it's only a fad, Garth."

In an exclusive residential section in north Chicago, there was a scared banker. Fright was suddenly in his voice, and something more than fright.

"It couldn't be, Garth. It's not possible. I've read extensively of doll magic. There is no motive. It's a coincidence, Garth. There's nothing to it."

"Of course there's nothing to it," Garth said. "I didn't intend to alarm you. It couldn't be anything but a coincidence. Forget it, will you?"

HE HUNG up. Somewhere in the back of his mind he was aware of a feeling of cold. Doll magic, loose in Chicago now! He called the other members of the Circle. They were sorry to learn about Winkles, very sorry. No, they had heard nothing of a man named Herkles, who made dolls. They had heard no hints of anyone practicing doll magic.

Garth walked out of the drugstore where he had been using the telephone. Next door to the drugstore was the Seventy-Seven Club. It was a fashionable nightclub. A taxicab was pulling up in front. Two girls with their escorts were getting out the cab, apparently heading for the nightclub. The girls were laughing. They were out for a good time, to have some fun. Garth caught a glimpse of the compact one of them was carrying. Attached to the

compact was a tiny plastic doll.

Girls, rich girls, wearing dolls, carrying tiny dolls with them. What did it mean? Or didn't it mean anything? Garth was again aware of a feeling of cold.

He spent the next several hours visiting mediums, fortune tellers, astrologers, part of the vast fraternity that prey on the credulous. Many of them knew Garth, by reputation at least, but whether they recognized him or not, they were unanimous in denying that they knew anything about a man named Herkles, who made dolls. Garth talked to eleven of them, before he decided that this line of questioning was leading him nowhere.

When he reached his apartment, he discovered that at least one of the fortune tellers must have lied. Attached to his doorknob was a small package. Opening it with extreme care, he discovered it contained a tiny doll, a caricature of himself. His features had been grossly exaggerated, the ears were oversize, the mouth a distorted slit, the eyes out of line, and the nose far too long for the rest of the face. The mannikan looked like the effort of a child to work in modelling clay, but there was a nastiness about it, a viciousness in the features that showed it had been carefully and maliciously constructed.

Attached to it was a note:

"Keep your nose where it belongs."

Some fortune teller that Garth had interviewed in his search for information had informed Herkles. Herkles had acted. The doll was the result.

CHAPTER III

The Old Antique Shop

THE grotesque little doll sat on the desk in front of Rawls. Rawls was a banker, a heavy-set, well-groomed man with gray showing at his temples. He stared somberly at the little figurine.

"It *looks* like it was made out of the same material as the doll my daughter has," he admitted. "I never paid to much attention to the one she was wearing, but there is a certain similarity between both of them, as if they had been made by the same artists. Where did you get this one?" He looked up at Garth.

The time was about eleven o'clock in the morning. Garth had taken the doll that had been tied to his doorknob and had come to Rawls with it. There was a possibility that the banker might recognize it as being similar to the one his daughter owned. If that was true, then certain logical deductions could be made from that fact. One deduction was that the girl would know where she had got her doll. If both of them had been made by Herkels, then Garth had a wide open trail leading straight to the man he was seeking!

"I found it tied on my door last night," Garth said bluntly. "There was a warning attached."

Rawls leaned back in his chair. For a moment, he seemed to stop breathing. His eyes fixed Garth with a steely intensity. "You fully realize what you are saying?" he said at last.

"I realize it," Garth said. "That is why I want you to examine that doll very carefully, to make certain whether or not it resembles the one your daughter owns."

There was the catch that was perturbing Rawls. If Herkles had made both dolls, then somehow or other Herkles was aiming at this man's daughter, Mary Rawls! Garth had met her. She was about nineteen, a blue-eyed, winsome girl, just budding into the full promise of womanhood. If she owned a doll made by Herkles, then one fact

was clear—she was in danger. Whatever scheme Herkles was working, no matter if she had innocently acquired the doll, she was in danger.

The banker's face whitened. Because he was a member of the Circle, he instantly realized the full implications of what Garth had said. Muscles knotted in his jaws. His daughter! But he did not try to dodge the issue. He never dodged an issue. That was one reason why he was an important figure in the financial world.

This time the figurine on his desk got an examination that was almost microscopic in its intensity. Rawls did not touch the thing with his fingers. He turned it around with the point of a pen, stared at it from all angles. It was weighted in the bottom so that it immediately bobbed erect if it was upset. Garth waited for the man to finish.

In his mind was the wonder—Where is this thing leading to? If Herkles is aiming at Mary Rawls, if he is aiming at the two girls I saw get out of the cab last night, then this thing is no teapot tempest, no matter of a fake telling fortunes for fifty cents. It's big, big!

A banker's daughter! Two girls who obviously had belonged to the upper crust both socially and by right of wealth! Was Herkles planning something that involved the daughters of all the rich men in Chicago? Was this thing that big? What had Winkles stumbled into, paying for his curiosity with his life?

RAWLS looked up at him. "They were made by the same person," he said. "I'm almost positive of it."

"I was afraid that would be your answer," Garth said.

"Damn him! I'll break his neck!" Rawls exploded.

"Easy," Garth said.

"But it's my daughter who is involved. *My* daughter!"

"I know," Garth answered. "But remember, we're not certain yet. There is still the possibility that you are mistaken in your identification, and, even if you are right, there is the chance that the whole thing is a coincidence. We may be entirely wrong."

"Do you believe we're wrong?" Rawls shot at him.

"What I believe is not important," Garth answered. "I don't believe anything, yet, and won't believe anything until I have more facts." He looked at the banker.

"What do you want me to do?" Rawls asked.

"Talk to your daughter, find out where she got that doll, find out why she got it, find out everything you can."

"I'll do that right now," Rawls said, reaching for the telephone.

"No!" Garth barked.

Rawls stared at him in astonishment. "What do you mean?" he demanded. "I thought you wanted me to talk to my daughter."

"I do want you to talk to her, I want you to find out where she got that doll, but I don't want her to know you're interested in the thing. Think, man! Supposing Herkles did make that doll. Supposing she tells him you were asking a lot of questions about it! What will happen then?"

Rawls hesitated. "I see," he said slowly. "How will it be if I call and ask her about something else, then casually mention that a friend of mine wants to buy one of those dolls for his daughter and ask her where she got it? Would that be all right?"

"Probably," Garth thought. "But be damned casual about it, will you?"

He listened while Rawls made the call. The stage had lost a competent actor in this banker. Rawls called his daughter about an unimportant matter,

then casually, as thought it was an afterthought, he brought up the doll. He carried the conversation off perfectly. Not by tone or word did he indicate how important her answers were to him, but, when he hung up the phone, there were beads of perspiration on his forehead.

"She says there is an old antique shop on the Near North Side that makes the dolls," he said. "The address is 279 W. Wickham Street. She said that if you went in to buy one of the dolls, you had to tell who sent you, and that I could tell my friend he could say she sent him. Garth, I don't like this business. I don't like it a little bit."

"I don't like it either," Garth answered, turning to leave.

"Wait a minute," Rawls objected. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to look over the antique shop," Garth answered.

"But isn't there anything I can do to help? After all, I'm involved in this thing. I'll do anything, hire detectives, go with you myself if you want—"

"Maybe later," Garth said. "If I can use you, I'll let you know. In the meantime, I'll keep you informed of anything that comes up."

Garth exited. He appreciated the banker's offer of help, but this was a game that had to be played alone.

WICKHAM STREET in the 200 block was devoted almost entirely to antique shops. There was a small restaurant, two second-hand book shops, a cleaning and pressing shop with a faded sign in the window, and a small hotel. The hotel was directly across the street from number 279.

Garth registered in the hotel, flagrantly signing the register as John Smith and paying in advance. The decrepit clerk regarded him with unspoken suspicion and inquired would Mrs. Smith be along later. Garth's curt "No!" shut him up. He got a room facing the street.

Number 279 looked like an ordinary antique shop. Several large blue vases were displayed in the window, together with some ancient clocks and old firearms. There was a collection of daggers, what looked like an old cavalry saber, and other odds and ends, the show window giving the appearance of a junk shop trying to masquerade as being in the antique business. Garth watched the place all afternoon. Occasionally he caught glimpses of a bespectacled clerk peering out through the front window, but otherwise there was little sign of activity. The shop was in the front of what had once been a large residence, with which it was connected at the rear. The residence was a cupolaed affair constructed of gray stone and it belonged to that period in Chicago when the meat packers and other industrialists were trying to outdo each other in the matter of creating architectural monstrosities in which to live. Probably it had a bathroom tiled with Italian marble and a winding staircase made of solid oak. The blinds were tightly drawn.

Garth had often wondered what went on inside those old stone houses that had been constructed by an older generation and had outlived their usefulness. They always looked like witch's hovels.

The antique shop, he soon discovered, was doing little or no business. A few seedy customers wandered in, but were immediately steered out again by the bespectacled clerk. It was the middle of the afternoon before the two girls entered. Well-dressed, clean-limbed, about twenty years old, they went directly into the shop. They didn't come out.

An hour passed. The two girls still

had not come out. All the other customers had left the place minutes after they entered, but the two girls had stayed over on hour. Garth was wondering if there was a hidden exit somewhere and if they slipped out through some door which he could not see.

Two more girls entered. Like the first pair, these were well-dressed. Garth saw them come walking down the street. They paused a second in front of the antique shop, looked furtively around to see if they were being watched, then ducked hastily through the door.

Girls, going into an antique shop! Garth sat up. What the devil was going on over there that was so attractive to girls?

"Is that antique shop a front for a coke joint?" he wondered.

Was it a hideaway where girls, attracted by the thrill of the forbidden experience, were supplied with narcotics? Or was it something else, something that had no name, something even more hideous than a coke joint, bad as that was?

Another hour passed while Garth waited. Then the first two girls came out. Garth watched them closely. They seemed perfectly normal, there was no slightest suspicion of a stagger, they walked quietly down the street, turned the corner, and went out of sight. They had been in the antique shop over two hours.

How had they spent two hours in such a crummy little place as that?

What had they been doing?

Gartha ransacked his brain trying to think of a solution to the problem. Dolls, an antique shop furtively frequented by girls, a man who had died babbling that Herkles was making dolls! What did it all mean? Twist the factors as he would, he could not see that they meant anything.

But they did mean something. He knew they meant something, if he could only find out what it was.

THE second pair of girls emerged from the antique shop. Garth recognized them by the dresses they were wearing. They came out quietly and in equal quietness walked down the street. If he had not known they had spent over two hours in the place, Garth would have sworn they had been merely shopping, and not finding what they wanted, had gone on to some other store.

As soon as the girls left, the clerk let down the shutters and locked the front door. Quitting time. The antique shop was finished for business for the day.

Garth went home. Dark had fallen by the time he reached his apartment. The Chinese, who served him as combination house boy and cook, had dinner waiting.

"Anyone call while I was gone?" Garth asked.

"Nope, boss, nobody call up on talking phone. Him note come while ago though."

"A note?" Garth questioned. "Where is it?"

It was lying on the end table beside the sofa. He opened it. A single sheet of paper fell out. On the paper, printed in block letters, were the words.

YOU WERE TOLD TO KEEP YOUR NOSE WHERE IT BELONGED. NOW SEE WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU.

Garth, mystified, stared at it. It was obviously a threat, similar to the threat that had accompanied the tiny doll he had received. But—what had happened to him?

"Chan, who brought this note?" he demanded.

"Find him under door," the Chinese replied.

Garth pursed his lips. He had the dim

feeling that something was wrong, definitely wrong.

"Has anybody been here this afternoon?" he questioned.

"Nope, boss. Nobody him come."

"No peddlers even?"

"Nope. Nobody."

Garth made a quick search of the apartment. Everything was in perfect order. Nothing had been changed so far as he could tell. But the note plainly indicated something had happened to him.

"What the devil does it mean?" he thought.

Suddenly a possible meaning occurred to him. Ten seconds later he was across the hall pounding on the door of the other apartment. "Pat! Pat! Are you there, Pat?"

There was no answer.

He twisted the door knob. It turned under his fingers. The door swung open. He took one look inside and his heart jumped up into his mouth.

There was an overturned chair in the middle of the floor. The rugs were disarranged, as though something had been dragged across them. These were the only two signs of disorder.

Garth raced through the apartment. In his heart, he knew the answer before he searched. He did not need two minutes to confirm the fact.

Pat was gone.

Pat had been kidnaped.

That was what had happened to him. Patricia Rohm had been abducted. Herkles was striking at him, through her.

CHAPTER IV

The Threat of Herkles

GARTH spent fifteen minutes searching her apartment, hoping that the men who had abducted her had left a clue that might serve to identify them or to indicate where they were taking Pat. They had left nothing behind them. He wondered how they had gotten her out of the apartment, in broad daylight, without being seen. Any of several ruses might have been used. They might have taken her out on a stretcher, silencing any question with the statement that she had suffered a sudden illness and they were taking her to a hospital. They might have had a fake ambulance waiting on the street for them. They might simply have forced her at the point of a gun to walk out of the building. No one would pay any attention to them. In a city this size no one ever paid any attention to anything.

Where had they taken her? Anywhere! There was no knowing. Chicago offered a multitude of places where they could keep her hidden forever.

What would they do with her? That, Garth knew, would depend on what he did. They had seized her to hold over him, to force him to abandon his investigation. Herkles was not only ruthless, he was smart; he played for keeps. Herkles knew that a threat against Garth himself would not be likely to bring results, whereas a threat against Pat Rohm—

As long as Herkles held her, Garth would not dare move against him. And Herkles could hold her as long as he wished!

Garth started back to his own apartment. And, as he stepped into the hall, stopped in his tracks.

Patricia Rohm was coming up the steps toward him.

There had been times in his life when Garth knew his eyes were lying to him. Magicians doing card tricks, sleight of hand, tricked the vision. He had the dazed impression that this was another

of those times, that Pat Rohm, coming up the steps, could only mean that he was being tricked.

"Pat! *Pat!*"

She reached the landing, smiled, came toward him.

"Yes, John, it is really I."

"Do you mean it? I mean—I just came from your apartment—you were gone—there were signs of a struggle —I found a note waiting for me—Pat, are you all right? Did you manage to escape from them?"

He was almost inarticulate. Wondering if he would ever see her again, he had met her coming up the steps toward him. This was either an illusion or a miracle. He did not know which it was and he was afraid to guess.

"Of course I'm all right," she said.

She looked tired. Her face was white with fatigue. There was a dazed, incomprehensible terror in her eyes.

Garth, yelling at Chan to bring brandy, led her to his apartment. She sank into a chair with a sigh of relief and when the drink was brought, accepted it gratefully. Garth watched her as he had never watched a crooked magician in his life. How had she managed to escape? The thought was a growing thunder in his mind.

He restrained his questions. She was obviously on the verge of exhaustion. The terror in her eyes showed that she had been through hell and the memory of it was still with her. The important thing was that she had escaped. Rest would cure the exhaustion, tender care would soothe away the bitter memories. Garth waited for her to speak.

"John," she spoke suddenly, "do you love me?"

GARTH would not have been more startled if she had produced a gun and started shooting at him. "John, do you love me?" The question was perturbing. There was between them a deep emotional bond but neither of them had ever spoken of it. Each had been content to know that the bond was there and not to seek expressions of it. Love was something that would not go into words, a deep and abiding tenderness the true meaning of which no sounds could convey. There had been no conventional courtship between them, no talk of marriage, yet Garth had thought of it and he knew she had thought of it. Neither had spoken, each content to let the future bring what it would. Courtship and marriage could come in their proper time.

"My dear!" Garth gasped.

"Do you love me enough to take me far away and never ask any questions about what happened this afternoon?"

He did not know what to do or say. He stared at her, his mind a blank.

"My dear—" This time the words were whispered.

She did not seem to hear him. As though she were speaking lines she had learned by heart, she continued:

"Because that is what Herkles says you must do, if—if—"

The words came slower and slower still then ceased coming altogether as she slid down in a faint.

GARTH frantically revived her. Until she had fainted, he did not fully realize how much she meant to him. She was not out long and when she came to, he fed her slow sips of brandy. The hot drink brought a faint trace of color to her cheeks. He waited until he was sure she was strong enough to talk.

"Pat, what did they do to you?"

"You mustn't ask that."

"But—"

"Herkles said I wasn't to tell you."

"Did you see him?"

Her quick, shuddery little nod conveyed more terror than Garth had ever seen before. "John, it's awful, what that man is doing. He has involved dozens, maybe hundreds of innocent people. He can force them to do anything he wants them to do. The thing he is planning is monstrous. It's not just a charlatan preying on credulous people. He's a charlatan all right, and a crook, and everything else that is bad, but he has power, power, *power!* In another few months, he will be the strongest man in Chicago—" She broke off suddenly, as if she had said too much. The lights of terror danced in her eyes.

"What is he doing?"

"I can't—can't tell you that."

"You mean—?"

"I mean I can't." Her voice was almost a sob.

"What is this power that he has?"

"I can't answer that either."

"Why can't you?"

"Because—I can't explain. Please don't ask me. I would if I could."

Garth hesitated, puzzled by her strange reluctance to talk. She acted as if she was under duress, that some kind of compulsion was being exercised over her.

"Don't be afraid, Pat," he pleaded. "No one is going to hurt or harm you. You're safe now."

She didn't attempt to follow the lead he had given her. He wondered if she was under the influence of drugs. Perhaps Herkles, while he had her in his power, had injected some drug into her. Could that account for the strange way she was acting.

"How did you escape?" he asked.

"I—I didn't escape."

"You didn't escape! But Pat, that doesn't make sense. If you didn't escape, how did you manage to get away from Herkles?"

He thought that she either had not understood his question, or grimmer and more likely possibility, she was out of her senses.

"He—turned me loose," she answered.

"Turned you loose!" Garth echoed. If Herkles had gone to the trouble and taken the risk of kidnaping her, why would he turn her loose when he had her in his power?

"He released me." The words were spoken in a dull monotone. She was talking like a machine that could answer only the questions asked it but could not elaborate on the answers.

Garth, not speaking, stared at her. In the back of his mind a grim suspicion was beginning to form.

"What message were you to carry to me?" he asked, at last. He did not want to ask this question because he was desperately afraid of the answer she might give him.

She spoke so promptly that he knew he had punched the right button on the machine.

"I was to tell you that you were not to molest him in any way, or to take any action of any kind against him. I was to tell you that you must leave Chicago, now, tonight, or—or—" Here the machine ceased running smoothly, as if there was a crack or a break in the record.

"Or what?" Garth prompted.

"Or I will die, horribly," she answered.

GARTH rocked back on his heels. So this was it! Unless Herkles was left strictly alone, Patricia Rohm would die! In Garth's mind was the mad wonder, not whether Herkles would carry out his threat—there was

no question of that—but how he would do it. After all, it was not easy to commit murder, not when the victim was warned and on guard.

Garth laughed, a harsh, mirthless sound. "I'd like to see him try to hurt you!" he said savagely. "I'd like to see him try it just once."

"You don't understand," she said.

"What don't I understand?" he questioned. "You're here and you're safe. You'll stay here and you'll stay safe. I'll hire special guards to be on duty day and night. If Herkles as much as shows his nose in this neighborhood, he'll get a bullet put through him."

Dully, mechanically, she repeated the words. "You don't understand."

"What don't I understand?" he questioned. Grimly, he suspected what the answer would be. He was forcing her to speak, hoping to learn something that might be of value.

"You can't guard me, you can't protect me," she said.

"Why can't I guard you?" he demanded. "I can turn this building into a fortress. If that isn't enough I can take you where you will be safe."

"There is no place on earth where I will be safe."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean Herkles has me in his power, just as he has other people in his power, that no matter where I am, if he wills it, I will certainly die."

Garth swallowed. The reality was even worse than his suspicion had been.

"How can he do that?" he demanded.

"I know, but I can't answer," she replied. There was terror and longing in her eyes when she looked at him. "That was why I asked you if you loved me enough to take me far away, to never ask questions about what happened this afternoon. Because if you don't take me far away, and leave Herkles strictly alone, no matter what you do to protect me, I will die. That, John, is the message I was to convey to you."

She was sitting up straight in the chair, looking at him and through him and into dim infinities. "I am in his power," she whispered. "There is no escape. Whether I live or die depends entirely on you. That was why he released me to return to you, why I was permitted to go, because, after what was done to me this afternoon, there is no place on earth where I can find safety. No place—on earth—" The whisper died into silence.

It seemed to John Garth that this moment something alien, something terrible, something horrible came into the room, came like a stalking jungle cat out of the night and into the light, bringing horror with it.

"What was done to you this afternoon?" he asked.

She opened her purse. Out of it she took a tiny doll that was an exact replica of her. The face, the chin, the eyes, the nose, were those of Patricia Rohm, reproduced in the form of a tiny plastic doll.

CHAPTER V

"Leave Town or Else!"

"DAMN!" Garth said. He rarely swore but this was one of the times when only profanity could adequately express his feelings. He did not know what to do.

"I don't believe it," he said. "I don't believe Herkles can do what he claims. He has hypnotized you, that's all. And he's trying to bluff me. I have one of those dolls too, remember. Herkles made it. And he doesn't have any control over me. He doesn't really have any control over you. You just *think* he

does. He's working some kind of hypnosis—"

He did not know whether he was arguing with her or with himself, trying to convince himself that his suspicions were wrong. There was a strong possibility that hypnotism was involved. It would have to be a new and different kind of hypnotism from that known to the medical profession but there was a chance that Herkles had stumbled on to some new form of hypnosis and was using it to further his ends. If Pat had been hypnotized, all of her actions would be readily explainable. The doll would be merely a fixation point to remind her that she was under hypnosis.

She was unperturbed by his argument. "My doll is different," she said. "I sat for it. You did not sit for the doll that was made of you and it has no power over you. It was only intended as a warning, in your case."

"Nonsense!" Garth blurted. "Pat, listen to me."

"I tell you my doll is different," she mechanically repeated. "The doll that was sent to you was only a warning. It doesn't count."

She seemed very certain of what she was saying. Garth hesitated, undecided on how to proceed. If she had been hypnotized, she would naturally think her doll was different. In that case, her insistence meant nothing.

"Are you going to do what Herkles asks?" she suddenly demanded.

"I'm thinking about it," Garth evaded. He did not want to answer that question, if he could avoid it. "Pat, can't you tell me just a little about what was done to you this afternoon. Did they force you to stare at a strong light, or something like that?"

He was trying to change the subject.

She wouldn't permit him to change it. "Are you going to do what Herkles asks?" she repeated.

"Why are you so insistent about this?" he questioned.

"Answer me!" The reply came like a shot.

"Well—"

"John, please don't try to evade," she said impatiently. She was sitting up very straight again, looking straight at him, but not seeming really to see him.

"I'm not evading."

"You are evading. Answer my question!" The words were rapped out.

"No!" Garth said. He had reached a decision. He was going to take the bull by the horns and see what happened. Herkles simply *could* not have the power to carry out his threat! It was impossible!

THE second he answered he was aware of a sudden increase in tension in the girl. She sat up a little straighter, her chin was thrust out a little farther. She still looked straight at him, but Garth was willing to swear she was not seeing him. Her eyes were out of focus, were not carrying impressions to the mind behind them.

"The consequences—will be serious," she said.

"Pat, please," Garth begged. "Try to get yourself under control. You're simply under hypnosis. That's all that is wrong with you. Nothing can happen to you, now. I won't let anything happen to you."

She didn't hear him. She didn't even hear the words, or, if she heard them, they made no impression on her mind.

"Is this your final answer?"

"Yes," Garth said.

As though he had tripped the trigger of a land mine, she exploded out of the chair. One hand dived into her purse, came out clutching a needle-pointed stiletto. Like a tigress, she launched herself at Garth. With maniacal strength and desperation, she was

trying to kill him.

She loved him and he loved her. Neither of them under any circumstances would have spoken an unkind word to the other. Yet she was trying to kill him.

Garth saw the knife coming. He was sitting on the sofa directly across from the chair in which she had been sitting. For a split second he was too dazed to move. If he had not been a competent acrobat, if he had not spent years training his muscles to respond instantly, he would never have escaped the attack. The knife would have plunged into his heart before he could have moved. He jerked himself down and to one side. The knife went over his shoulder, buried itself in the cushion of the sofa. He grabbed her arms before she could strike again.

He found himself with a hundred pounds of fury on his hands. Her strength was almost superhuman. She jerked free. Wild, blazing lights guttered in her eyes. She struck again with the knife. Garth grabbed her wrist.

"Pat!" he shouted.

She didn't hear him.

Chan, attracted by the commotion, came running from the kitchen.

"Grab her legs," Garth shouted to the cook. "But don't hurt her."

Chan, imperturbable as ever, grabbed her legs. For an instant she struggled against them. Then, as though her fury had spent itself, she dropped the knife and sagged limply into Garth's arms.

SHE lay on the couch without moving, looking up at him. There were tears in her eyes. "I didn't mean to do it," she whispered. "I didn't want to do it. But if you refused to do what Herkles wants, I was ordered to try to kill you. I couldn't help it, John. Please, please, believe me."

Garth wiped beads of perspiration from his forehead. He was worse shaken then even he cared to admit. After the demonstration he had just seen, he could no longer doubt that Herkles possessed the power to impose his will on his victims. Whether by hypnosis or by other means, the charlatan possessed incredible power.

"I believe you, Pat," Gartha whispered. He could imagine the delight with which Herkles had contrived this plan. Garth murdered by his sweetheart! Herkles would think this was wonderful. His delight would be increased by the knowledge that the girl would probably have to stand a murder trial for her act. No jury would ever believe she had acted with any motive other than that of premeditated murder. She had brought the knife with her. That alone would prove premeditation. She would have had to pay the penalty for her act, if she had succeeded. Garth cursed under his breath. Herkles had certainly planned cleverly!

"What are you going to do now?" she whispered.

"Do you mean, am I going to turn you over to the police? Of course not!"

"I didn't mean that. Are you going to leave Chicago, to forget all about Herkles?"

She was back again to the original question. This time Garth knew he had to find an answer. She had said she would die if he refused. Had she meant she would try to kill him and be caught herself in the murder trap, or did she mean that his act of refusing to leave the city would automatically sentence her to death in some other form? Garth did not know which was true, but he no longer doubted that Herkles had the power to kill her. In that case, if Garth refused to do what the charlatan wanted, he would be sentencing her to death.

On the other hand, if he did take her

away, how did he know that she would not try to kill him again? She had said she would be safe no place on earth. Seemingly, no matter where they went, Herkles could force her to strike again at him. Under those conditions, Garth knew that he would be living under a constant threat of death, never knowing when it was coming, only certain of one thing, that it *was* coming, that some day, sometime, somewhere, the girl he loved would try to kill him.

GARTH'S mind raced over the possibilities. He reached a decision. He forced himself to smile.

"I'm going to take you far away," he said.

Exultation lit her face. "Good!" she whispered. "Oh, John, I'm so glad. Herkles won't bother us again, if we go away. He swore he wouldn't."

"And because he swore it, I am sure it's true!" Garth thought grimly to himself. Aloud he said, "Do you have any suggestions as to where we should go? Are there any limits to where we may travel, any forbidden territories, or anything?"

"No," she answered quickly. "Just so you don't come within five hundred miles of Chicago, in the future. Everything will be all right, as long as you stay that far away. Any place will be all right with me."

"How about Southern California?" Garth questioned.

"That would be fine," she replied. "But we must go at once, tonight. Not tomorrow. No waiting or delay. We must take the next train or plane."

"I'll go right now and call the airport," Garth promised. He went to the telephone, called the airport, spoke loud enough so that she would be certain to overhear him. No, he could not make a reservation on a plane before day after tomorrow, and maybe not then, unless he had priorities.

"We can't make it by air," Garth called out.

"Try the railroads," she promptly suggested.

Garth called again. He made a reservation for two staterooms on a train leaving at midnight. "What's that?" he barked into the phone. "I have to come down and pick up the reservations immediately? You can't hold them for me? All right. I'll pick them up within an hour." The surprised ticket agent didn't get a chance to explain he had said no such thing.

"We're leaving, Pat," he said. "You pack your clothes and I'll go down and pick up the tickets." He hoped his voice was convincing.

"Can't we pick them up at the station?" she questioned doubtfully.

"They said no," he answered. "War regulations. I'll pick them up. Are you strong enough to pack your clothes or do you want me to help?"

"I'm strong enough," she replied.

"You do that, then. And you might pack a bag for me. Meanwhile I'll go get the tickets, and as soon as I return, we'll leave."

With the memory of her wan smile, he went out the door. Vehemently he hoped he had done a good job of putting on an act. He certainly was not going after any tickets but he had wanted her to believe that he was.

He was going after Herkles.

CHAPTER VI

The Studio in the Basement

EVERY time Garth thought of the gamble he was taking, he felt cold all over. He did not mind risking his own life—that was part of the game—but he was risking the life of Patricia Rohm as well, and this risk was not

part of any game that he wanted to play. It was a risk he had to take, for her sake as well as for his own. Unless she could be rescued from the vicious thralldom that held her, life would not be worth living.

Herkles would never keep his promise not to molest them if they left Chicago. Eventually he would exact his full pound of flesh. If she was to be saved, the job had to be done now. Garth suspected it had to be done before midnight, before train time. If he missed that train, Herkles would learn about it, and Pat would pay the price.

Garth went directly to the street where the old antique shop was located. The evil, whatever it was, stemmed from here. Herkles ought to be here, probably in that shabby mansion at the rear. From his hotel room that afternoon, Garth had made a careful survey of the situation. He knew exactly what he was going to do and how he was going to do it. He walked down the side street and faded unobtrusively into the alley that ran behind the old mansion.

In the darkness of the alley, he paused, his hands going over his clothes. The compact little pistol was in its holster under his armpit. Distributed in odd places about his clothes was an assortment of tiny tools that would have made a master mechanic blink his eyes in surprise. There were little drills made of the hardest steel, thin-nosed flexible pliars, glass cutters, tiny screwdrivers, several lengths of steel wire, a strong jimmy, and other odds and ends that he had devised himself. A cop, picking him up, would have thrown him in the clink immediately, for having burglar tools in his possession. Even an examination in a police station would not have revealed all the tools Garth was carrying. There was, for instance, a tiny instrument that looked like a piece of steel wire hidden in the roof of his mouth. One end was a saw blade, the other end was very useful for picking locks. Not for nothing had Garth made a careful study of the abilities of Houdini, the master magician who laughed at locks. Houdini's ability to swallow and regurgitate a small tool Garth had never mastered, but most of the other stunts the old master could perform he could duplicate.

HE REACHED the basement window of the old house. This was the spot he had chosen to make an entry. He did not use the jimmy on the window, did not pry or even touch the frame. There was too much of a chance that the frame was wired to a burglar alarm. He attached small suction cups to the glass. There followed a tiny scratching sound, then a soft plink. The entire pane of glass, held by the suction cups, lifted out into his hands. Carefully he set it down beside the wall. Then, taking great pains not to touch any wires that would be part of a burglar alarm, he went through the window, dropped lightly to the floor.

The basement smelt of mustiness, of dead air, and the damp of slow decay. Using his pencil flashlight, Garth ascertained that he was behind the furnace in a small room set off from the rest of the basement.

Above him the house was silent. The only sound was the dull rumble of a nearby street car, earth-transmitted and echoed here by some trick of sound reflection. Garth cautiously opened the door of the furnace room.

To his right a flight of heavily-carpeted steps led upstairs. Directly across from him was a heavy door. A partition of oak planks had been built across the basement, obviously a fairly recent construction. It was the door that held Garth's gaze, the door and

the extremely expensive lock that was fitted to it. Why should anyone go to the trouble of putting so expensive a lock on a door in a partition in a basement? He slipped forward, under the beam of his light, examined the door. It had been painted green and the paint had blistered. He experimentally pried loose one of the blisters.

And discovered that the door was made of steel.

"Hm!" he whispered. "A steel door in the basement! Well!"

A lot of money had been spent on the lock in that steel door. No doubt the manufacturer had guaranteed it was burglar proof. The manufacturer would have been surprised if he could have seen what happened to it. On the third try the door opened.

The room inside had been elaborately furnished. Money had been spent here, lots of money, in making over a basement into what purported to be the studio of an artist. A thick carpet that gave forth no sound of the footstep was on the floor. The walls hung with tapestries and the ceiling was draped with soft silk of a light blue color. There were soft chairs and smoking stands. The whole place gave forth the air of leisurely comfort. An extremely rich artist might have designed this studio, presuming any artist could ever want a studio in a basement.

The artist who worked here was neither a painter nor a sculptor. There were no easels in sight, none of the paraphernalia that goes with working in clay or in stone. There was a small platform with a strange, metallic-looking chair sitting on it. Beside the platform was the weirdest machine Garth had ever seen.

He walked slowly around it, studying it, but could not discern its purpose. It was electrical in nature, but whether dynamo, generator, X-ray, or radio transmitter, he could not tell. It seemed to combine parts of all these devices, part X-ray, part radio, part electrical generator. A madman or a genius had built it. Or maybe the builder was both madman and genius.

What was the purpose of this machine? A cable carrying a number of wires connected it to the metal chair on the platform. In addition, a stream of magnetic flux seemed to be focused on the same chair. Garth could discern neither rhyme nor reason anywhere about the thing. As he studied the device, he became aware that somewhere in the basement mice were squeaking.

They were odd mice. They squeaked in chorus. There seemed to be hundreds of them, squeaking away in some hidden place. Garth realized he had been hearing the sound ever since he first entered this studio.

There might be two or three mice in any basement in Chicago. But hundreds of mice all in one place—

GARTH began to seek the source of the sound. He discovered it was loudest near one of the walls of the studio. Pushing the tapestry aside, he turned his pencil flashlight on the wall. The mice could be plainly heard now. Somehow they didn't sound quite like mice. Garth could not decide what they did sound like. Just listening to them somehow made his flesh crawl. There was something alien, something terrifying about the sound. He examined the wall. An ingeniously concealed door was hidden there. He started to pick the lock. At the scrape of his tool in the tumbler of the lock, the mice were suddenly silent. The lock clicked. He pushed the door aside a fraction of an inch, peered into the room that lay beyond, and recoiled in horror.

The door opened into a big room. He did not need to use his flashlight to see

what was in there. A battery of sunlamps shed a soft glow over the place. The room was alive, not with mice, but with *dolls!*

Tiny dolls two or three inches tall. Companies, platoons, regiments of them were on the floor. They seemed to be everywhere.

They were alive!

All of them were looking toward the open door. Drawn back in a respectful semi-circle, they faced the door, their little round faces turned toward the opening.

Garth felt the skin crawl all over his body. What deviltry was here? What were these tiny mannikins, these little living dolls?

They faced him in silence. Then one of them darted out of the group, and looking up at him, squeaked. The sound was toneless and while the gesture indicated the sound might represent a language, it was no language that Garth recognized. He bent down.

"What is it, little man?" he whispered.

The little creature scurried back to the others. Garth straightened up. His first amazed thought had been that here was a race of tiny humans, that somehow he had stumbled into Liliput, but he had seen enough to convince him that these little creatures were not human. He did not know what they were, but with the memory that Herkles was somehow practicing doll magic, he had horrible suspicions about them.

Inside he was as cold as ice. Mentally he was on the verge of hysteria. He had to fight desperately to keep his startled mind from running away with him. Here, if his suspicions were correct, in the basement of this old house was such horror that he had never dreamed existed.

A sound from the studio whirled him around. The sound was that of a key slipping into a lock. He slipped the tapestry back into place, closed the door in the hall so that only a crack remained open, peered into the studio. A click sounded. The lights flashed on, revealing the chair on the platform, the strange machine standing beside it, and another, hooded machine that Garth had noticed but had not had time to investigate.

Herkles entered the room. Two girls followed him. Behind them came a second man, apparently a servant, who scurried around seeing that everything was in order.

"Usually," Herkles said, frowning at the two girls, "I do not wish to be disturbed at night. It was my impression, Miss Rawls, that you understood my desires in this matter."

Garth almost jumped out of his skin. One of those girls was Mary Rawls, daughter of the banker! He had met her but at the moment he did not recognize her. The other girl was a vivid blonde.

"I'm sorry," Mary Rawls said. She shrank away from Herkles' frown as if he had threatened to strike her with a whip. "I knew you did not prefer to have us come at night, but this was the only time when Genevieve could come. It is also becoming very difficult for me to come. Daddy, for some reason, wants to know where I am going every time I leave the house—"

"What's this?" Herkles snapped.

HERKLES was short and squat, with long powerful arms and tremendously thick shoulders. His face was round and puffy, with pouches under the eyes, with a skin that seemed always to be exuding grease. He was dressed in a black robe and a square black skull cap. Both robe and skull cap were covered with glittering spangles that reflected the light.

"What is this about your father?" Herkles demanded. "Has he suddenly become suspicious of what you are doing?"

"Well, it isn't exactly that he is suspicious," the girl explained. "I just get a feeling that he is watching me all the time out of the corners of his eyes. He never says anything, and I'm not even certain he is watching me but I think he is. It doesn't matter, of course, except that I worry about it."

"Hm," the magician said thoughtfully. For a moment he considered the matter. Then he smiled. "You are quite right, Miss Rawls. It does not matter." He turned to the second girl. "And what can I do for you, my dear?" He was all oily suavity now. All the harshness gone out of his voice, he was a charlatan giving a prospective client the business.

"You made one of those good-luck dolls for Mary, didn't you?" the blonde girl said.

Herkles bowed. "I had that honor," he said.

"I want you to make one for me."

Herkles smiled. "It will be a pleasure," he said.

"Will it bring me good luck?" the girl questioned.

"It is guaranteed to do that," Herkles answered. He began to talk, and even Garth, hiding in that room where the horrible dolls were now silent, in spite of himself was almost impressed by what Herkles said. For the charlatan gave a scientific lecture on the nature of what is called luck, pointing out that what is often called good fortune is really the operation in an individual of some extra-sense, some ability to perceive what is the right thing to do in every situation and to do it. Thus a lucky poker player, who knows when to bet, when to bluff, and when to get out of a hand, may in reality possess some degree of extra-sensory perception, enabling him to guess the cards his opponents hold. "This sense is present in all of us, to some degree," Herkles ended his explanation. "I have merely devised a means—" he pointed to the chair on the platform and to the strange machine sitting beside it "—of accentuating the development of this ability. There is no magic involved, only cold, scientific logic."

It sounded reasonable, too reasonable. Garth, listening, knew at last the bait Herkles used to lure the unwary into his trap—the hope of good luck. Like his kind the world over, Herkles preyed by preference upon the rich, who, in spite of their wealth, were far more credulous than the poor. Both girls in the studio obviously came from wealthy families.

GARTH watched the performance that followed. The blonde took her seat in the chair on the platform. The machine was turned on. The tubes came to life, glowing with dull violet lights. A transformer hummed steadily. The mice squeaks in the room where Garth was hiding were completely silent now, as though they knew what was happening in there, and relished it. Or possibly the operation of the machine had some soothing effect on them.

When the performance was over, Herkles took from a compartment in the machine a tiny plastic doll, which he gave to the girl. She took it, stared at it with awed eyes, then slipped it into her purse. She paid cash for it. Garth saw five one-hundred dollars bills change hands. Then the servant escorted the two girls from the studio. Herkles remained behind until the man returned.

Herkles was in a good humor. "The fools!" he chuckled. "The little fools.

They think they are getting something that will give them good luck forever."

"Yes, master," the servant said.

"They do not know that after they have been exposed to this machine, it is I who control their thinking thereafter, I, Herkles, who owns them body and soul, I, Herkles, who dictates their every thought and action, if I will it, even to life itself. Ho!" He roared with laughter.

From a second compartment of the machine he took another doll. He put on gloves before he touched it, handled it with extreme care. Unlike the doll he had given the girl, this one moved in his hands. It squeaked when he touched it. He swiftly took it to the hooded machine, worked quickly for a few minutes. Then he started toward the room where Garth was hiding.

Garth had anticipated what was going to happen next. He had already closed the door. Now he flattened himself against the wall in the corner. His hand was on his gun. If Herkles saw him, this business would end here. He did not want to shoot Herkles yet, because there were other things he wanted to know, many other things. He crouched against the wall.

The door opened. The dolls in the room squeaked, drew back. Herkles carelessly tossed another doll into the room. This one was blonde. It looked frightened and afraid, as though it knew something had happened to it, but it did not yet know what.

"Stay there until I need you," Herkles said.

He closed the door.

Garth wiped sweat from his forehead. The blonde doll was shrinking away from the others. They made no move to harm it. Instead they gathered around it. It answered them in a dazed, dull little voice, a frightened little voice that cried something had been done to it, only it didn't know what.

Garth knew. He was sick, sicker than he had ever been in all his life. He knew now what Herkles was doing here in this basement, what the real purpose of the old antique shop was, and the secret of the terrible power that Herkles possessed. It was an awful power. It was perhaps the greatest power ever possessed by any man on earth.

Garth waited until he was sure the studio was empty. Then he cautiously opened the door, peeked into the other room. The place was dark, Herkles and the servant gone.

Garth slipped into the studio. The little dolls, as though they suspected what he was going to do, were silent.

He spent an hour there, studying the two machines. One of them, with a smile of grim satisfaction, he set in motion. "Now, Herkles," he thought. "We'll see what happens! If I'm right—"

If he was right, the doom of the charlatan was assured. If he was wrong—

He shuddered to think what would happen if he was wrong.

"Now to get out of this place," he thought. He wanted to watch what happened but he wanted to be across the street in the hotel when it happened.

He slipped silently out of the basement, climbed out the window. The pane of glass was where he had left it. He picked it up, set it back in place, was busily attaching little strips of transparent adhesive tape to hold it where it belonged when

Thwuck!

A blackjack or a club hit him full on the top of the head.

He didn't see the blow coming and when it hit, all he saw, as he slumped to the ground unconscious, was a collection of shooting stars.

CHAPTER VII

The Secret of the Dolls

GARTH'S first impression, before he was sufficiently conscious to open his eyes, was that his head was as big as a balloon. It was filled with inflammable hydrogen gas and red-hot streaks of lightning were flashing through it, threatening to explode it at any moment. Then he opened his eyes and realized that the ballon was in reality his head and that the lightning flashes were jolts of pain. He got another, different kind of jolt immediately.

Herkles was bending over him.

Herkles was in a rare good humor. "Well, well," he said. "If it isn't Garth, the amateur sleuth. Nice to have you with us, Garth. Welcome, and all that sort of thing. But what delayed your arrival?"

Garth sat up. The effort sent a wave of nausea through him. When it subsided, his hand went, automatically, inside his coat.

Herkles laughed. "Your gun is gone," he announced. "All the other little gadgets you brought with you are gone too, including that tricky little tool you carry in your mouth. Tch, tch, tch, Garth, what if a cop had found you with all those burglary tools in your possession? He would have thrown you in the clink for sure."

Garth swallowed. He ran exploratory fingers over his head, winced when they touched an egg-shape bump.

"You should have been more cautious," Herkles observed. "Not that it would have done you any good because my men were watching for you."

"Watching for me?" Garth gulped.

"Of course," Herkles answered. "We knew you would be along. You didn't, for a minute, succeed in deceiving the astute Miss Rohm with your story about going after the train tickets. As soon as you left your apartment, she phoned me that you would be here soon. Naturally," Herkles chuckled, "I made preparations to receive you."

"Pat—Pat called you!" Garth whispered. "She guessed I was coming here and told you!"

Herkless seemed to find his surprise most amusing. "Naturally she did," he answered. "Does the thought that she betrayed you turn a knife in your heart? Perhaps you did not realize that she is working for me now, that she is loyal to me alone."

"Damn you!" Garth grated. "What have you done to her?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Herkles answered.

"But how could she know I was coming here?" Garth protested. "I think you're lying! I think you're trying to bluff me!"

"Maybe she didn't know for certain that you were coming to see me but she *guessed* you were. It turned out to be a good guess, didn't it? I've had my men spotted around the block looking for you ever since she called. Incidentally, even if she hadn't called, I had suspected you would turn up here, especially after I sent her back to you. That would be your normal reaction. I don't mind admitting I was ready for you, in the even my first plan miscarried."

"Your first plan?" Garth whispered.

"To have her kill you," Herkles explained. "Tell me, how did you avoid that knife, Garth? I had hoped she would succeed in killing you and in consequence be tried for murder. That would have been a neat touch, wouldn't it? Of course, I knew there was a chance you would dodge the first thrust with the knife and then succeed in overcoming her. That was why I instructed her to call me and tell me exactly what you did, if she didn't manage to kill

you. Oh, I assure you I forgot nothing. When that damned Winkles got to you I knew I had to remove you. If I let you live, you would be certain to try to interfere with my plans. I couldn't have that, under any circumstances."

"No," Garth said wryly. "I imagine you couldn't. Incidentally, what are your plans? What is this new game you're working? What is back of all this business about the dolls?"

GARTH'S face showed baffled wonder. Inside he was as tense as a cat in the presence of a dog. Herkles, in spite of his boasting, had obviously made one mistake.

Herkles was pleased at Garth's question. It gave him a chance to talk about himself. "I don't mind telling you, Garth, that I have discovered something that is the biggest thing I ever found. It is so big that I scarcely dare let myself think about it. You see me now hiding in a wretched mansion. No doubt you think of me as a cheap crook without any followers and without any real influence anywhere. Mark my words, Garth, the time will come when I will be one of the most powerful men on earth. Another year, two years at the most, and I will hold Chicago in the palm of my hand. I will have in my control all the key men in this city, the politicians, the bankers, the newspaper owners, the police commissioners and all the rest of the police force if I need them. The beautiful part is that I will have control of these men and they won't know it! They will think they are acting in their own behalf, but every action they take will benefit me. I will be the secret ruler of this town, with all its wealth and all its power at my command."

Herkles was pacing back and forth as he talked of the shape of things to come, if his dreams came true. Garth knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that the charlatan's boasting was not idle talk. Herkles had the power to make his dreams come true. If unmolested, he would eventually rule Chicago, and unless he chose to reveal his secret, no one in that great lake city would ever know the name of the man who was its master.

Garth could imagine what would happen then. Herkles would not reveal himself, but from the men and women of the city, he would collect a continuous stream of golden tribute. All that wealth could buy would be his, men would be his unknowing slaves, and women—the women, too, would do what Herkles wanted. A picture of Nero in the days of Rome's decadence came to Garth's mind, Nero indulging in bacchanalian revels, sucking the life out of his people, feeding on them, glorying in his pomp and power. Herkles would be another Nero, unless he was stopped.

How to stop him? Standing just inside the door of the room were two guards, servants of Herkles. Their wooden faces showed that they were more than servants, they were slaves. They might not know it, but the bonds of their servitude were forged. Herkles owned them as no master of the olden days ever owned his slaves. They belonged to him, body and soul. Garth watched them closely, taking great care not to reveal that he was watching them. His only hope of destroying Herkles lay in these wooden-faced men, or in others like them.

HE WONDERED if he really had any hope at all. Did he have a chance to destroy Herkles? Or was his hope an illusion that would fade into nothingness? He did not know. The working of his plan to eliminate Herkles would show on the faces of the

guards, and their faces showed nothing.

"Isn't it interesting to know that you, my enemy, will become one of my favored helpers in the future?" Herkles questioned.

"What?" Garth questioned. He had been watching the guards, and had not been paying full attention to what the charlatan was saying.

Herkles' grin was cat-like. "You no doubt are wondering what I am going to do with you?"

"The thought hadn't entered my mind," Garth answered.

"It hadn't?" His brazen answer nonplussed the magician for a moment.

"What can you do with me?" Garth asked. "There are only a limited number of possibilities. One, you can kill me. Inasmuch as my disappearance will be discovered and investigated by the police, you may find a certain hazard in killing me. Two, you can hold me prisoner. This, I assure you, will also result in attention from the police. Three, you can try to bribe me, you can offer me a part of your gains in exchange for my silence, hoping that eventually, when you get a good chance, you can have me removed. Those are your alternatives, Herkles."

Garth was bluffing, stalling for time. He apparently was giving his full attention to the magician, but all the time out of the corner of his eyes, he was watching the two guards.

Herkles smiled. "I have another alternative," he stated.

"What is it?" Garth demanded. He had to watch his answers carefully. It would not do to reveal that he knew too much.

"I can handle you in the same way that I handled Patricia Rohm!" Herkles said triumphantly.

Garth kept his face under control. He was not supposed to know what had been done to Pat. He must not reveal that he did know what had happened to her. His face showed only baffled unconcern. It indicated he did not know what the devil Herkles was talking about. Inside he was as cold as ice.

Herkles was going to force him to sit in that chair in the basement studio. And there would be another addition to the little room where the things that squeaked like mice, but weren't mice, were held prisoner. Garth felt his heart turn over. If that happened to him, never afterward would anything matter.

"What, really, did you do to her?" he questioned. "I suspected hypnosis, but there seems to be more involved than that."

"There *was* more involved than that," the magician answered. "Much more. Oh, you needn't try to draw me out. I have no intention of revealing my secret to you, not yet, anyhow. It is enough for you to know—" he chuckled "—that you are going to become one of my little helpers."

Still chuckling, he nodded to the two guards. "Take him down to the basement, boys. If he resists, use force. I'll come along with you to handle the actual operation."

At his nod, the two guards started toward Garth. Wooden-faced, they were going to obey Herkles' orders.

GARTH knew, then, that he had failed. He hit the first guard who approached him on the point of the jaw. The blow was delivered with all his strength. The man went down with a crash that rattled the old house.

Before Herkles or the second guard could move, Garth leaped toward the door.

"Grab him!" Herkles shouted.

Garth jerked the door open and plunged into the hall. At the front of the hall was another door, which opened into the old antique shop and from that

to the street beyond. Garth turned toward the rear. He was not familiar with the arrangement of the rooms in this hideaway but there ought to be a kitchen at the back and a rear door. Herkles and the guard were right behind him as he dived toward what ought to be the kitchen.

It was a kitchen, all right, with a big gas range, a large refrigerator in an alcove, china in wall cabinets, and a large serving table. It was this table that held Garth's attention. Two hard-faced men were eating cheese sandwiches and drinking beer at it. They looked up in surprise as he kicked open the door.

For a split second he hesitated, deciding what to do. Herkles was right behind him. He couldn't turn back. All he could do was dive past the two men at the table and through the back door. Before they had time to realize what was happening, he dived past them.

As he went past them, one of them picked up a beer bottle and hit him across the head with it. He rammed headlong into the kitchen wall. When he regained consciousness he was in the studio in the basement. Herkles was clucking at him in an irritated manner.

"Tch, tch, tch," the charlatan was clicking. "You shouldn't have tried to escape, Garth. You didn't have a chance to make it. Now, because you were so foolish as to try to escape and got yourself hit over the head, I shall have to delay treatment of you until you have regained full control of your faculties. Otherwise I could not guarantee results. The subject, you understand, must not be suffering from shock at the time of treatment."

"It's too bad I got myself hit over the head and delayed what the hell it is you are going to do to me," Garth muttered. "Damned inconsiderate of me and I suppose I ought to apologize but I don't believe I will." He looked dazedly around the room. "What kind of a joint have you got here, Herkles?"

"This is no joint," the charlatan said angrily. "This is my laboratory. I might mention that in the future this room will probably become a holy shrine and pilgrimages will be conducted here. You don't seem to understand, Garth, that I am going to have a place in history, that I will become the most outstanding man who ever lived. If I choose, I can easily become the ruler of earth, establish a dynasty, be known as Herkles the First, and by passing my secret on to my descendents—"

The charlatan was dreaming again. Garth scarcely listened to him. There were four hard-faced guards in the studio—apparently they were there to control him if he tried to escape again—and he was watching them. Did they seem to be showing uneasiness? Or was he only imagining that they were looking worried about something, that their minds were elsewhere.

The squeaking mice were silent.

GARTH was sitting on the floor. He had been carried to the basement and dumped on the floor. He was content to sit there, his head cradled in his hands. Herkles fussed around him.

"I believe you're stalling, Garth," the charlatan commented. "I believe you're pretending to be hurt worse than you really are."

"Go to hell," Garth said. "Whatever it is you're going to do to me, get it done and over with."

"No hurry, Garth, no hurry," Herkles grinned. He seemed to be enjoying the situation. There was something of the cat and mouse complex in his makeup. He got a kick out of the sufferings of another human. "We don't want to rush this. Everything must be

just right, you know."

"No, I don't know," Garth grated. He got to his feet, swung wildly at the magician. Herkles dodged the blow and laughed.

"Try again," he taunted.

Garth swung again, missed, fell to the floor, tried to pick himself up and failed. He gave an excellent imitation of a badly hurt man trying to get up and fight. In reality he was stalling and the only fight he was waging was for time. If Herkles enjoyed seeing him suffer, Herkles would prolong the pleasure of watching. Garth wanted it to be that way. His only hope now lay in the guards. He did not know whether it was a hope or an illusion. Sitting on the floor, he fluently cursed the magician, and watched the faces of the guards. There was no doubt about it now! They were showing definite signs of uneasiness. Garth's heart leaped at the sight.

There was a knock at the door.

Herkles frowned, nodded to one of the men, who opened the door. Another guard was outside.

"Stamm!" Herkles snapped. "Stamm? Oh, yes, I remember him now. What is he doing here?"

"He says he wants to see you, sir."

"Wants to see me?" Herkles gasped. "Doesn't the damned fool know that he isn't supposed to come here? What is he doing here anyhow? What does he want?"

"He wouldn't say, sir. He is acting very sullen. All he will say is that he wants to see you. Shall I send him down, sir?"

"You needn't bother about asking," another voice spoke. "I've come down myself."

A man thrust himself past the guard at the door, stumbled, almost fell into the room. Short and heavy-set, he looked like an underworld gorilla, a hired bodyguard, a thug, a killer. He had a round frozen face and weak blue eyes that fixed themselves in terrible intensity on Herkles.

"I want to see you," Stamm said.

"What about?" Herkles demanded.

"You've been pushing me around," the man said sullenly. "I'm getting tired of it. I want it stopped, see. I don't want any more of it."

Herkles took a step back. There was doubt and surprise and the shadow of beginning fear on his face. Garth, sitting on the floor, did not move a muscle. He had never seen Stamm before, had not even known that the man existed, but he knew what was happening. "At last!" he thought, and the unspoken words were a prayer of thanksgiving.

"You must be out of your head," Herkles said. Some of the ego, some of the pomposity had gone out of him. "Leave this room immediately. Do you hear me? Leave immediately."

Stamm did not move. Pale eyes glittering in a frozen face, he stared at Herkles.

"Seize him!" Herkles shouted at his men. "He's out of control. Shoot him. Shoot him at once."

NOT a guard moved. Garth, glancing at them, saw that the doubt, the uneasiness he had detected on their faces had intensified, grown stronger. They stared at Herkles as if they did not see him.

"Obey me!" the charlatan shouted. "You fools! Don't you realize the power I have over you? Don't you know that I can destroy you, utterly, if I so desire? What do you stare at me like that? Seize this man." Dramatically he pointed at Stamm.

Garth held his breath. Would they obey their master? Or would they defy him?

"I don't know but what Stamm is right," one of the guards spoke.

"Right?" Herkles stuttered. "Have you gone insane too? Shoot him. I command it."

The guards did not move.

"It seems to me Stamm's got the right idea," one said.

"Yeah," a second chimed in. "You've been pushin' us around just like you owned us."

"Somebody would think we were your slaves," the third added.

"You are my slaves!" Herkles screamed.

"Are we?" Stamm said. "We'll see about that." His hand dived inside his coat. It came out, with a knife. He dropped into a crouch, started toward Herkles.

Herkles took one look at him. Then, like a badly frightened rabbit, he turned, darted toward the hooded machine at the rear of the studio. With a single motion, he jerked the hood away, took one look at it.

"It's running!" he gasped.

In those two words he showed that he understood at last what was happening. His fingers darted among the buttons displayed on the switchboard there. Garth came to his feet.

Herkles must not be allowed to change the combinations that had been set on that machine, must not, under any circumstances. Garth hurled himself toward the charlatan, hurled himself too late. Stamm was there before him, Stamm with his knife. Herkles screamed as the knife ripped into him, screamed and squirmed away. Blood spouted from his side where the knife had hit him.

"Damn you, Garth!" he shouted. "You did this! I'll fix you for it. Oh!" He was screaming again. Stamm was still using the knife. Herkles dodged away from it. With maniacal fury, he struck at Stamm, who struck back at him.

If Herkles had stayed and fought, if at all costs he had remained by the machine and by risking his life had managed to manipulate the buttons properly, he might have had a chance. But the knife struck terror in his soul. He couldn't face that knife. Like a cornered rat, he whirled away from Stamm, darted for the door. His feet pounded on the stairs.

Stamm was after him. Like a bloodhound that has cornered its prey, he hurled himself after Herkles. Fundamentally, he was a killer, and he was on the job. The four guards joined him in the chase.

They caught Herkles somewhere on the stairs. There was the sound of blows, a loud screaming that ran swiftly up the scale. Then there was a muffled pistol shot and the scream sobbed into silence. A heavy body thumped from step to step as it slid down the stairs. It reached the bottom and lay still. Red streams rilled slowly from it, rilled slower and slower still, stopped flowing entirely.

Garth hastily closed the door. He was glad that it was made of steel. That meant the guards could not break it down. Not that he expected them to try to break it down. Or, if they did try, they would not long continue in their efforts. He turned hastily to the machine from which the hood had been removed.

IT WAS at least three hours later when he opened the door of the studio and listened at the stairs. The old house was quiet. Not a sound came from anywhere. From the room where the strange mice had been kept there was not a sound. The mice were silent forever. Herkles lay where he had fallen, at the bottom of the stairs.

Herkles was also silent forever.

Garth searched through the basement until he found what he wanted. He spread the liquid everywhere. He thought, when he struck a match and the kerosene flamed up, that this was arson, but he couldn't help that. This studio and what it contained must be utterly destroyed. Fire was the only agent he could trust to do the job the way it had to be done.

From the outside nothing was visible as he slipped away. The shutters and the blinds kept the light of the flames from appearing to anyone on the street.

WHEN he reached his apartment and quietly let himself in, she was sleeping on the couch. She stirred as he entered the room, blinked sleepy eyes at him. Then, recognizing who it was, all her sleepiness was gone.

"John," she whispered. "It's finished. You found it and destroyed it."

"Yes," he said. "I found the doll that Herkles did not show you, that he did not show to any of his victims. I found hundreds of them, the little secret dolls that were animated with some kind of strange life of their own, the dolls that were en rapport with the people they represented, the dolls that Herkles used to control his victims. They've been destroyed, all of them. How did you know it had happened?"

"I felt it, as soon as it happened. It was like a great weight had been lifted from me. John, you know, don't you, that he had me under his control, that I couldn't help myself—"

"I know," Garth said gently. "I know."

"How did you manage to destroy them?" she questioned.

"I made them destroy Herkles first," he explained. "Herkles made a mistake. When his men caught me, he thought I was entering the house for the first time. Instead, I was leaving it. He did not know and he did not find out until it was too late, that I had already been in his studio, and that I had tampered with the controls of his own machine, and had set his own men against him."

He paused. In his mind was the memory of the grim way Stamm had entered the studio, the frozen, hypnotized look on his face. Stamm had been one of Herkles' men. He wondered about Stamm and the others, freed now from the secret chains that had bound them. He wondered if they would ever know what had really happened to them. Or would Mary Rawls, who had thought she was buying a good luck doll and instead had given herself away into slavery, would she ever know she had been freed? Her father would know. Garth would tell him the whole story. But the others—there must have been hundreds of them—girls, men, women—would they ever know the fate they had escaped?

Pat Rohm sighed sleepily. The natural color had come back to her face, the sparkle to her eyes. Garth grinned. He had saved the thing he valued most in the world—the sparkle of light in the eyes of Patricia Rohm.

SODA POP GAS HAS GONE TO WAR

By Pfc. ASA BROWN

ONE quart of CO_2 in liquid form will fill about two and a half barrels when released. It will expand 450 times its compressed volume.

Gas inflatable lifesavers are now being produced by the million in all shapes and sizes. Carbon dioxide is also used for explosion-proofing empty spaces in wings and fuselages.

Soda pop gas still packs its triple threat as lifesaver, fire fighter and refrigerant, and has an expanding future both in war and peace. Remember this over your next soft drink.

LANGUAGE OF ELECTRONICS

By Cpl. King Keillor

IF YOU were to begin the study of Electronics, one of the first things you would do would be to learn the language of the electronics technician. This language looks like a jumble of hieroglyphics devised by an ancient civilization, but actually it's an easily understood system of symbols used to represent the many devices used in electronic circuits. The student does not find it much trouble learning to recognize and use the symbols because most of them are suggestive of the parts they represent. For instance, a diode vacuum tube is a two-element tube consisting of a filament or cathode which emits electrons, and a plate which attracts and collects these electrons. The symbol used to represent the diode tube is shown in Fig. 1 (see chart). The circle shows the glass or metal envelope, the bar at the top shows the plate, and the double-ended line shows the filament or cathode connections.

A triode tube is one which has three elements, the third one being a control grid which is shown by the addition of a wavy or dotted line in between the plate and cathode of the diode tube symbol, shown in Fig. I.

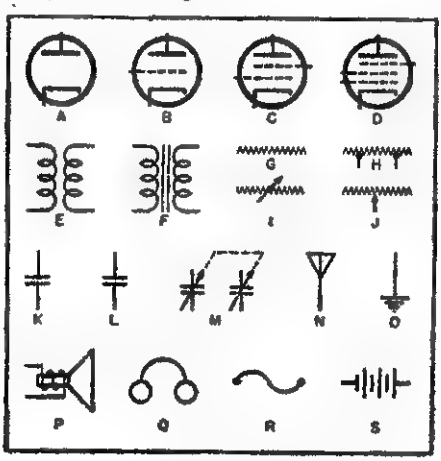


Figure I

A tetrode, or four element tube, is one that has an additional grid, shown in the tube symbol by a second wavy or dotted line (C). The pentode, or five element tube follows the same procedure, having a third wavy or dotted line to represent the third grid (D). Other multi-element tubes are shown diagrammatically in the same manner, by the addition of more lines or dots to show the extra elements inside the glass envelope.

Electronic circuits use many other devices besides the vacuum tube, and so each one has been allotted a definite symbol. One of these devices is a transformer, which is used to couple energy from one circuit to another by means of induction. This consists of two coils of wire placed near each other so that current flowing through one of the coils *induces* a current flow in the other coil placed near it, even though the second coil is not electrically connected to the first (E). This is the symbol for the *air-core* transformer. The iron-core transformer uses iron to aid in the inductive effect in the wire coils. This type of transformer is represented by (F).

A resistor is a device used to block passage of current, or to provide a voltage drop of a desired amount in order to apply the correct potential to the element it is connected to. There are different types of resistances, each with a separate symbol. (G) shows a fixed resistor (H) is a tapped resistor, (I) shows a rheostat, and (J) shows a potentiometer or volume control such as the one on modern radio sets.

Another electronic instrument which finds a lot of use is the condenser. (K) shows a fixed condenser (or capacitor, as it is more properly called), (L) . . . which should have an arrow through it in the same fashion as the left half of M . . . shows a variable capacitor, and (M) shows a ganged pair of capacitors. These last capacitors are both mounted on the same shaft, and so are tuned by the same dial. This dial would be the tuning dial on our radio set. This may have two, or even three capacitors in a ganged connection.

A radio antenna is (N), a ground connection is (O), a loudspeaker is (P), a pair of headphones is (Q), a fuse is (R), and a battery is (S).

By using these symbols the electronics man can reduce the most complicated-looking electronic mechanism into a simplified schematic diagram. This diagram can be studied with such ease that a large portion of electronics work such as troubleshooting and design is all worked out on paper, with a minimum handling of equipment.

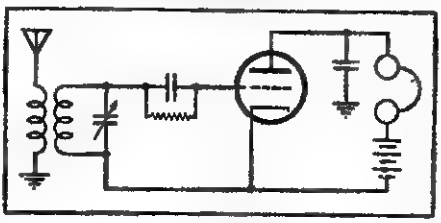


Figure II

Putting some of our symbols together to show a simple radio receiver, we would have something like the diagram in Fig. II. See how many items you can recognize without going back over the foregoing descriptions.

Next time you take your radio apart, just pay a little attention to the schematic diagram which usually accompanies the set, and you'll find it surprisingly easy to keep your hands off that 110 volt supply.

Mary snatched the sword, and in an instant she was the center of a melee of flashing blades.

Weapon for a Wac

By Sgt. MORRIS J. STEELE

ILLUSTRATED BY LT. RUSSELL MILBURN

Uncle Whitfield knew his psychology, and the power of suggestion; but was that really his plan when he cooked up a legend around a sword?

"HOGWASH!" said Mary Masonby Whitfield.

It was obvious that this very definite opinion applied to a gleaming, exotically-runed, definitely-old sword which she now tossed contemptuously back into the gnarled hands of Uncle Whitfield; obvious too, from the shocked look on his pink-old, white-moustached face, that he considered such an expression from the lips of a beautiful and supposedly well-bred young girl entirely out of keeping, if not downright irreverent. What wasn't so obvious was why such contempt should be directed toward an excellently fashioned and beautiful relic.

Uncle Whitfield revered that sword; he believed in the story he had just told to Niece Mary. If *she* didn't take any stock in it, the very least she could have done was to be polite and ladylike about it.

Suddenly Uncle Whitfield—nobody ever called him anything else—was no longer shocked . . . he was mad. Hot mad!

"You unpatriotic little—whippersnapper!" he roared. "You—" The roar became a rattle as his old vocal cords collapsed under the unaccustomed strain his emotion had placed on them. "You—" The right word wouldn't come, because Uncle Whitfield was a gentleman. All the Whitfields had been gentlemen—and ladies!—from time immemorial; or at least for quite a few generations. "I . . . I'm goddamed ashamed of you!" he concluded flatly.

Mary's blue eyes opened wide, and now it was she who was shocked. Like her uncle, her emotions ran into the same rut and she became tight-lipped and angry.

"Aren't you being just a bit of a jackass?" she flared. "*Really,* Uncle Whitfield, you don't expect me to dash into battle waving a silly old sword just because of some ridiculous fairy tale about a female Whitfield who once galloped into the fray and slew literally dozens of nasty villains who had invaded her fair land!"

"Did you say jackass?" asked Uncle Whitfield, with the air of one who has just been released from an inhibition.

Mary missed the look in his eye, but she unknowingly saved her ears from a siege of pinkitis by her reaction.

"Yes, Uncle Whitfield," she said in sudden contrition. "I did, and I'm awfully sorry." She came forward, took the sword and laid it on the table, then offered her cheek. "Do I deserve a forgiving peck?" she asked humbly.

"Always did like to kiss pretty girls,"

he growled and adroitly nudged her chin so that it was her lips he kissed rather than her cheek. "I forgive you the jackass: that's been apt more than once; but I don't forgive you the hogwash!"

Mary looked a trifle exasperated as she stepped back.

"I will *not* join the Wac! It's the silliest thing I ever heard. And I'm surprised at you spouting that stuff about that old relic. The old girl might have smelled of horses all right, but she never stuck that sticker through anything more than her father's empty pants, and I'll bet a dollar on it!"

"Do you know where I got that sword?" asked Uncle Whitfield, nettled.

"No. Come to think of it, you are the only Whitfield who has ever claimed it to be a family heirloom that I can remember. Where *did* you get it?"

"I got it from the Lady Guinevere Whitfield herself!"

Mary blinked, looked a moment at her old relative, then she walked quickly over to the liquor highboy, opened the swinging doors with a flip. A glance, and she snapped them shut. A frown was on her face.

"If *that's* it, you've got yourself lit on a measly ounce or two—and if it isn't . . ."

"I'm nuts, eh?" he flashed at her.

"If you want to put it that way," she said pointedly. "When you go spouting that a woman dead for centuries paid you a personal visit to give you that hunk of metal, I'm inclined to have my doubts about the way I've been taking care of you!"

UNCLE WHITFIELD'S face was strained, even more than an accusation of insanity should have made it.

"Mary, I've seen a lot of things in this life that are hard to understand. But I do understand that it's useless to try to convince anyone by simply telling them. So, do you want to do me a personal favor; in return for which I'll keep my mouth shut from now on?"

"If it isn't anything as silly as joining the army to pound a typewriter in some filthy barracks on an island fit only for black widow spiders . . . ."

"No such thing," snapped Uncle Whitfield. "That's your own warped idea of the way the Wac performs. Some do go overseas, but not . . . oh, forget it! What I want is very simple. You are about to retire for the night, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"All right. Then take this sword to your room with you, and when you are ready to go to sleep, turn out the lights and put the sword on the floor in the moonlight. There's a full moon tonight, and it'll shine straight through those big windows of yours, and . . ."

"Uncle Whitfield!"

"What?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Of all the crazy ideas! Are you trying psychology on me? Think I'll get conscience-stricken as I lie brooding in the moonlight with the thought of the history—or fiction! —of the sword making me decide finally to do and die for the Wac?"

"Your brother John enlisted after Pearl Harbor, and he's out there somewhere in the Pacific now, maybe dying at this moment . . . ."

"Posh! More likely editing the camp newspaper and gulping down chocolate creams adoring girl friends send him, surrounded the while by the menace of a half-hundred pin-up girls or so!"

"Bet you a thousand you haven't the guts to do it," said Uncle Whitfield quietly.

"Do what?"

"Take the sword to your room tonight."

Mary looked calculatingly at her

uncle for a moment.

"You may be crazy, but I'm not," she said. "If you'll pay me one thousand dollars tomorrow morning, I'll sleep with Satan himself. A bet it is, Uncle Whitfield!"

Mary Masonby Whitfield strode determinedly to the table, picked up the sword, brandished it aloft with a sweeping gesture and marched up the stairs.

"Come, brave Lady Guinevere, and bring your horses. Let us do boudoir battle!"

At the top of the stairs she turned to peer down at Uncle Whitfield.

"Uncle Whitfield?"

"Eh?"

"You . . . you don't feel sick?" There was an ill-concealed note of concern in her voice.

"Not at all," said Uncle Whitfield. "And I'm not drunk either. I'll have the thousand bucks ready in the morning."

"Then zounds on your ghosts!" She marched into her room. "Anybody who believes in them deserves to lose a thousand! Good night, Uncle Whitfield."

The 4-H Club never boasted a healthier specimen—Mary was asleep four minutes after she had turned out her bedroom light, lain the sword on the carpet in the square of moonlight from the window, and leaped into bed.

* * *

IT WAS a terrifying yell that awakened her. Startled into confusion, she leaped dazedly to her feet, clad only in the panties and brassiere she always wore in lieu of pajamas. The cold stone floor was a shock to her bare soles, but she paid scant heed. Instead she ran to the great window and peered out. The battlements below were bright in moonlight, and swarming over them was a horde of savage warriors; great clubs, knives and stones in their hairy fists. Bearded men they were, burly and hulking in the night. And as she watched, horrified, they swept over the defending guards.

Mailed men battled heroically, but they went down beneath a flood of shaggy forms, beaten into insensibility by vicious clubs and heavy stones that dented, crushed in, their visors.

What was this? Where was she? It *couldn't* be!

Mary's scream came suddenly, keening terror in the notes of it.

"Uncle Whitfield!" she cried in bewildered panic.

It seemed that the echoes of her scream were amplified, until she realized that it was another woman screaming, somewhere down below. Once more, drawn by the utter horror keening in that scream, she turned to stare down, and was fascinated by the battle that was going on.

A youth was rushing out of the castle, brandishing a shining sword aloft. He was unarmored, clad only in a simple leather shirt and a skirt that whipped about his knees as he ran.

"John!" gasped Mary incredulously.

But in a moment, as he charged into the full light of the moon, she saw that it wasn't her brother, but a youngster who looked strangely like him, yet definitely was not.

He was a raving fury, and he fell upon the raiders with flashing speed. His weapon wove a dazzling halo of light around the heads of his bewildered opponents. Two lay in bloody heaps on the ground before they recovered from the surprise of his unexpectedly virile assault. Then they rushed him.

At the same time Mary whirled at the sound of heavy footsteps from behind, and screamed as a bearded warrior seized her and lifted her to one broad shoulder. With a loud shout of delight at his prize, he raced out of the room and down a broad circular flight of stone

stairs into a great room below, and out into the courtyard.

The fighting was over; and Mary found herself thrust into a group of confused and bloody captives. Among them was the youth who had looked so much like her brother. Now, at close range, in the moonlight, she could see that there was but little actual resemblance. And yet, he had all the predominant features of the Whitfield family.

Sobbing hopelessly was a woman dressed in a flowing gown that impeded her movements. Her long golden hair hung down; and a warrior twisting her head back savagely, his fist knotted in the golden tresses, grinned down into the white face.

Other prisoners were being brought forward, making it evident that the attack on the castle had been successful. The raiders were in complete control.

The youth was recovering consciousness now, and he staggered weakly to his feet. His gaze fell upon the weeping woman.

"Weep not, Guinevere," he said. "The King's men will rescue us."

THE blood in Mary's veins froze at the name. *Guinevere!*

"No!" she gasped in utter terror. "It can't . . ."

The youth's gaze switched to her, and his gray eyes widened.

"Whence comest thou, wench!" he gasped. He stared at her scanty attire with eyes that almost popped from his head.

Mary stared back; and in spite of the horror that was numbing her mind, a small resentment bubbled up in her.

"I'm not a wench!" she essayed indignance. "I—this . . ." she faltered, and the horror returned, " . . . this is all a dream. It has to be!"

The burly warriors clustered around had been discussing their prisoners lustily meanwhile, and now they seemed to have reached some decision. One of them stepped forward, gripped the youth from behind and held his arms tightly pinned at his sides. Then he whirled him around with a shout.

Another warrior leaped forward with drawn knife. Before Mary's horrified eyes, he plunged the blade into the youth's stomach and ripped upward. With a horrid scream, the boy writhed in agony, then slumped down. The warrior holding him let him fall, then kicked the quivering body savagely.

Mary was paralyzed with terror. But not so the weeping Guinevere, Her sobbing had become a shrill scream of fury and despair, and before anyone could anticipate her motion, she had snatched the sword from the ground. But she seemed physically unable to wield it once she had it in hand; and before she could accomplish her purpose and thrust it into the body of the youth's executioner, a heavy war club descended on her head and crushed her skull. She went down, a pitiful bloody heap. The sword clattered to the courtyard stones at Mary's feet.

Acting as though in a daze, stung to action by the horrible atrocities she had just witnessed, inflamed to an unthinking fury, Mary snatched the weapon up. Her athletic body went into action, and the blade cut deep into a warrior's throat. He went down, gushing blood.

A yell of anger came from the warriors and they rushed at her. Another reeled away, his arm hanging limply and spewing blood as Mary struck him as though she were hitting at a speeding baseball. Another came toward her. She lunged forward, point of sword leveled, to plunge it into his chest.

The sword was wrenched from her hand, then she was whirling around in time to see a heavy club spinning

through the air. She felt a jarring concussion and all went black.

* * *

BUT only for an instant. Scrambling wildly on the carpeted floor she managed to get to her feet and free herself from the entangling folds of her bedclothes. A welling scream halted in her throat, unvoiced, as she gazed with incredulous relief at the broad rays of sunlight beaming into her bedroom. Her head still throbbed where she had fallen on it from the bed.

"A dream!" she gasped in relieved realization. "Oh, great heaven, a dream!"

Still shaking from the horror of her nightmare, she made her way into her bathroom and drew hot water.

The bath settled her nerves, but when she had finally clothed herself, she had come to a decision. There was a tight little smile on her lips, and a rather sheepish look in her eyes, which she managed to conceal as she made her way down the stairs.

Uncle Whitfield was sitting calmly in his easy chair, reading the morning paper. He looked up when she came up to him. Her hand was outstretched.

"One thousand dollars, please," she said in a mercenary tone. "And let it be a lesson to you to avoid too much imbibing just before bedtime, and before making bets!"

Uncle Whitfield counted out ten one-hundred-dollar bills and put them in her hand. He looked at her pert hat and at her coat.

"Going somewhere?" he said. "What is the matter with breakfast?"

She waved a hand carelessly. "I'll get that downtown. I'm off to spend this thousand . . ."

"Spend it?" She could have sworn there was disappointment in his voice.

"Yes. I'm going to buy me a nice little war bond. And Uncle Whitfield . . ."

"You're going to buy a *what!*"

"A war bond. And Uncle Whitfield, forgive me for having my little joke and kidding you last night. I really am patriotic. In fact, I had made up my mind yesterday afternoon to join the Wac. That's where I'm going now."

"Yesterday afternoon?" There was implication in Uncle Whitfield's voice.

"Yes," she said sweetly. "And a *good* night's sleep hasn't changed my mind. See you later, flag-waver!"

She swept breezily to the door. To herself she was thinking: *if he thinks I'll admit a psychologically induced nightmare changed my mind* . . . he's got another think coming, even if I would like to tell him brave Guinevere hadn't the muscles to kill a fly!

Uncle Whitfield watched her go. Then, when the sounds of her clicking heels had died away, he made his slow progress up the stairs to her bedroom. Under the bedclothes heaped on the floor where Mary had frantically scrambled from them, he found what he was looking for. The sword was there . . .

Its blade was covered with dried blood.

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DOUBLE-CROSS ON MARS

By Sgt. GERALD VANCE

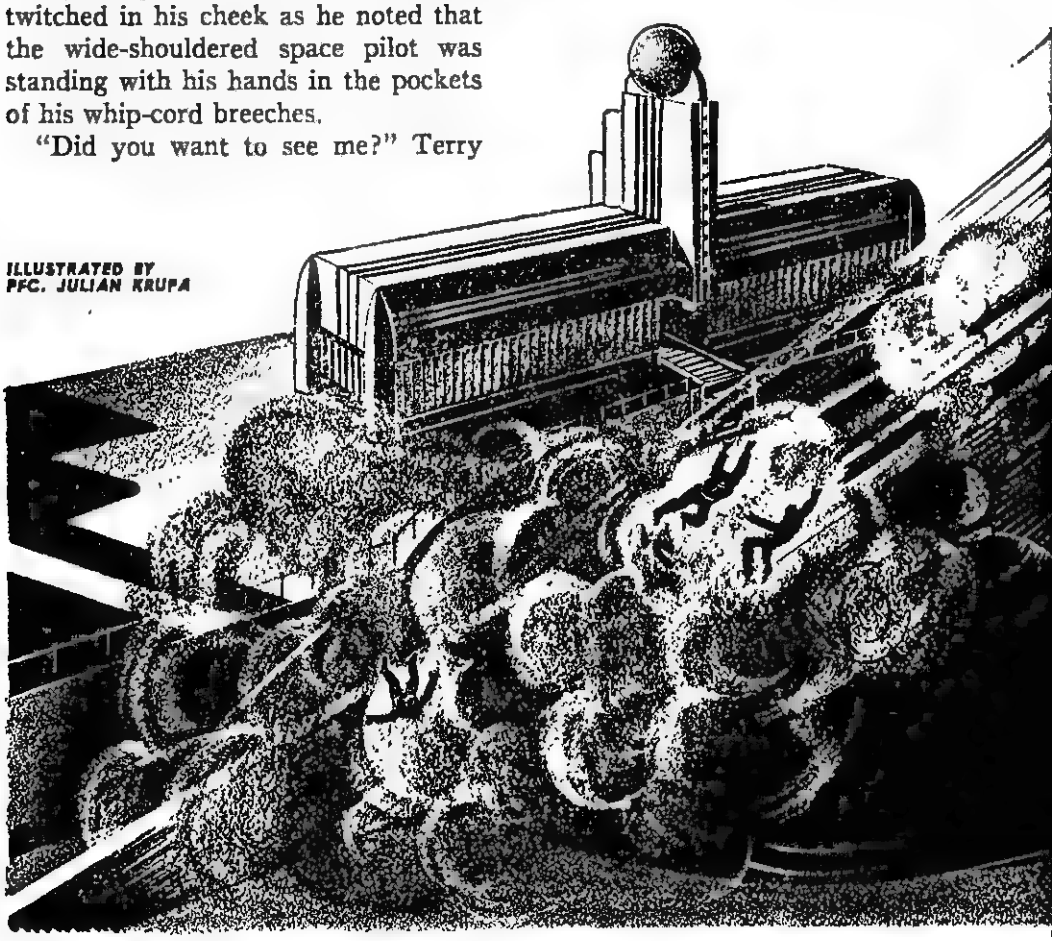
TERRY LESTER was a red-headed, square-jawed space pilot, and when he walked into Commander Moore's large imposing office he did it with the confident arrogance that marked his every gesture.

The commander was a small, tight-faced man with graying hair and keen, thoughtful eyes. He glanced up when Terry stopped at his desk. A muscle twitched in his cheek as he noted that the wide-shouldered space pilot was standing with his hands in the pockets of his whip-cord breeches.

"Did you want to see me?" Terry asked, chewing idly on a match in the corner of his mouth.

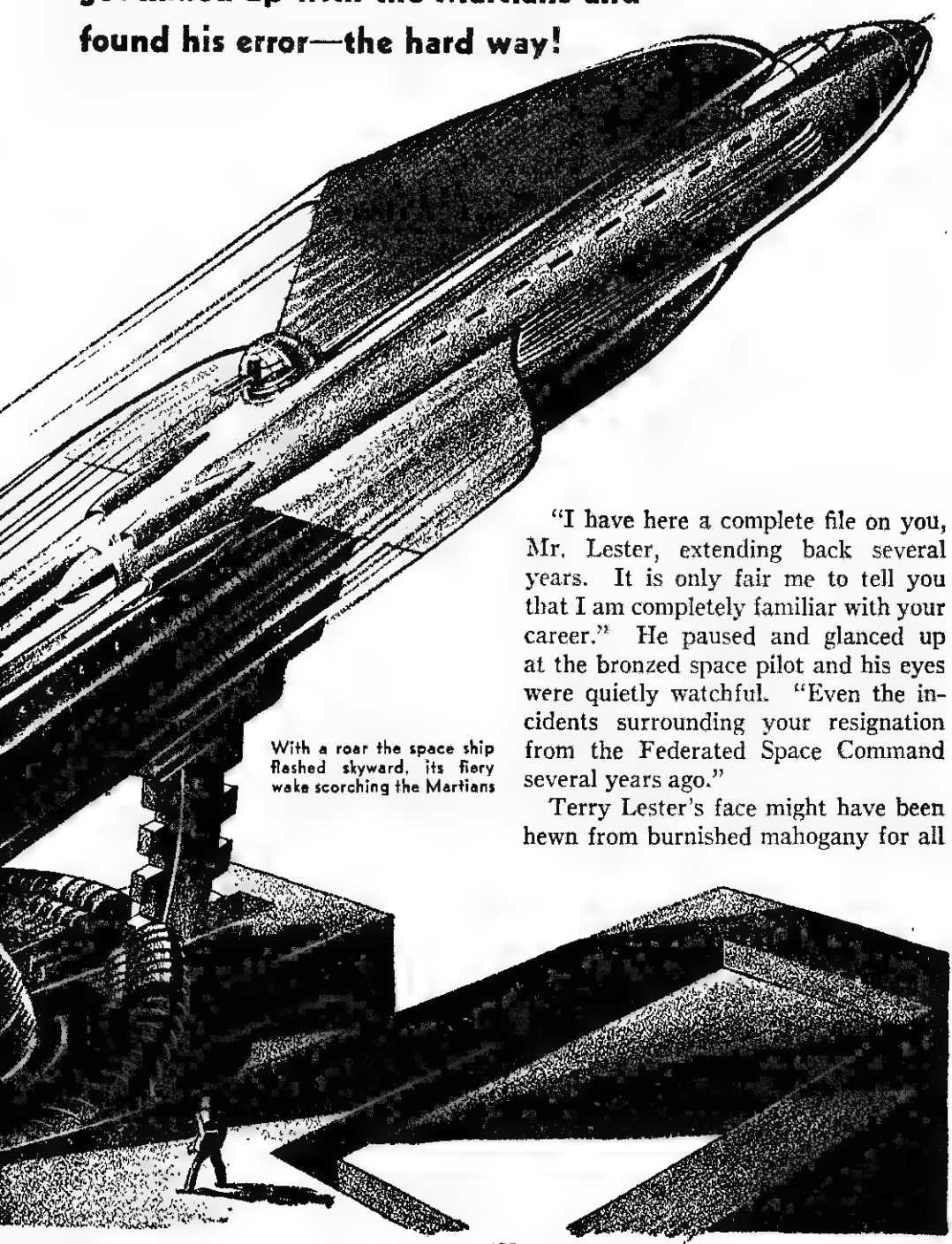
"Yes," Commander Moore said shortly, "I did. I wish to offer you a job of considerable importance and, I might add right here, considerable danger."

He leaned back in his chair and picked up a sheaf of papers from the desk.



ILLUSTRATED BY PFC. JULIAN KRUPA

Terry Lester figured he couldn't hate anybody as much as he did his employers. Then he got mixed up with the Martians and found his error—the hard way!



With a roar the space ship flashed skyward, its fiery wake scorching the Martians

"I have here a complete file on you, Mr. Lester, extending back several years. It is only fair me to tell you that I am completely familiar with your career." He paused and glanced up at the bronzed space pilot and his eyes were quietly watchful. "Even the incidents surrounding your resignation from the Federated Space Command several years ago."

Terry Lester's face might have been hewn from burnished mahogany for all

the expression that was apparent; but his eyes were like hard bright pebbles.

"I hope you enjoyed your snooping, Commander," he said ironically. "Since I am no longer one of your underpaid puppets, it doesn't matter a damn to me what you know."

He turned sharply on his heel and headed for the door. With his hand on the knob he paused and said over his shoulder, "Whatever your job was, consider it refused."

"Just a minute, Lester," Commander Moore said quietly, and something in his voice caused Terry to turn and wait as the commander stood up and walked slowly around to the front of his desk. "I am offering you this job," he continued, "knowing full well that you can refuse it if you like. You are a free-lance pilot and not subject to my orders. But I'd like you to listen to me for just a minute before you make up your mind."

Terry Lester glanced at his watch and grinned with sardonic amusement.

"I am a busy man, Commander," he said, "but fire away."

"I will be brief," Commander Moore said dryly. "The job I am offering you is a special assignment to handle our latest space-fighter in a public demonstration."

"Not interested," Terry said flatly. "I don't intend to risk this neck of mine testing some engineer's brain-child to give the public a thrill. Find another sucker to handle your space-going coffin; I'm not having any, thanks."

"This is not a demonstration to thrill the public," Commander Moore said quietly. "This is a demonstration which might very possibly save Earth from a gigantic space war which it is not, at this time, prepared to wage."

TERRY took his hand slowly away from the door knob.

"Go on," he said.

"This demonstration is scheduled for Mars a few weeks from today," Commander Moore said. "We have been invited to send our latest equipment there for the annual conference on space communication and travel. Ostensibly the offer had been made in the friendliest possible spirit, but our Intelligence believes that is merely a ruse to examine our latest fighter space craft at close range."

"Why send them, then?" Terry asked bluntly. "Tell the double-faced little red cockroaches to go to hell."

"Unfortunately Intelligence feels we aren't in a position to take that attitude," Commander Moore said, with a bare trace of sarcasm. "And if we refuse to send our latest space-fighter, the Martians will infer that we haven't any, or that our production is so slow as to make them a negligible factor in any immediate war."

"Well," Terry said irritably, "what's the dope? Have we got a fighter or haven't we?"

"We have a fighter space ship," Commander Moore said firmly. "We have a ship which we believe to be the most effective weapon in existence in the void today. But—" he paused and his shoulders moved in a shrug "—we have only one of these ready for flight at the present time. It is a special model, built practically by hand in our research laboratory. We are not yet ready to produce it on a major scale. When we are, we will be prepared for any contingency that might arise. But until such a time, we must bluff Mars into moving carefully and slowly in any belligerent action. If they see our experimental fighter in action, and are led to believe it is only one of thousands we are producing, they will not be anxious to provoke hostilities until they develop something to match our new fighter.

And that is going to take them considerable time, I can assure you."

"And I'm to go to Mars and fly this new fighter in a demonstration trial, is that it?" Terry asked. A sardonic grin lit his lean, burnished features. "What's the matter with your own precious pack of space flyers? Are they afraid to take the chance?"

Commander Moore's eyes were suddenly cold and hard.

"There isn't a space pilot in the Federated Command who wouldn't give his right arm for the chance I'm offering you, Lester," he said with icy deliberation.

Terry grinned with bitter amusement.

"Why don't you give one of them the chance?" he asked with gentle irony.

"You know that as well as I do," Commander Moore said, and the twitching muscle in his cheek was the only external evidence of his anger. "You still happen to be the best fighter pilot in the Universe today, Lester. And this job requires the best we have. I would rather have done almost anything else I can think of before begging you to take this assignment, but my personal feelings don't count. I have been ordered to assign this job to the best pilot I know, and you are that man. I am waiting for your answer."

"I'm sorry as hell about your feelings," Terry said with bitter sarcasm. "No one thought of mine when they drummed me out of the Command for gambling, did they?" He drew a deep heavy breath. "But that's neither here nor there. What do I get out of this thing if I accept?"

"I won't remind you of your obligation to Earth," Commander Moore said caustically. "Nor the possible satisfaction you might get from serving your native planet. I won't mention those things because I am afraid they wouldn't touch you. Instead, I will make this a strictly commercial proposition. I am offering twenty-five thousand dollars, payable immediately after the flight, regardless of results. Will you take it or leave it?"

Terry smiled but there was no humor in his hard, bitter young eyes.

"You're talking my language," he said. "I'll take it."

"You'll receive a contract tomorrow," Commander Moore said, "and your orders will be sent when you return the signed contract. Satisfactory?"

"Okay," Terry said. He turned the knob of the door. "I don't need the money, particularly," he added, "but I can't resist the spectacle of the Federated Command down on its knees whimpering for my services. I'll do your job, Commander, don't worry about that, but you can shove your twenty-five thousand dollars in your ear."

He slammed the door behind him and walked out of the commander's reception room with swift, angry strides.

HIS contract arrived the next day, and three days after he signed it an officer of the Federated Command arrived at his room and presented him with a sheaf of orders, sealed with the official insignia of the Command Headquarters.

Terry glanced through the orders, packed a small grip and a day later arrived at the closely guarded Federated research laboratories. He presented his identification and was led to a small office beside the main mooring tower, where a grizzled, white-haired old man sat at a desk, chewing on the stump of a cigar. He looked up sharply when Terry entered the office.

"Who're you?" he snapped peevishly. "How the hell am I supposed to get any work done if they use my office for a main spacelane?"

Terry ignored the outburst.

"Are you MacGregor?" he asked.

The white-haired man behind the desk gnawed viciously on his cigar and glared at Terry through the ragged tufts of his eyebrows.

"Who else would I be?" he demanded.

"You might be a refugee from a pickle jar for all I know," Terry said. "I'm Terry Lester. I understand some crack-pot here put a rocket on a tin can and thinks he's got a world-beater ship. I'm the guy who's going to tear it to pieces, if it doesn't fall apart blasting-off."

MacGregor put his horny hands on the desk and rose half-way out of his chair. His wrinkled face was an alarming shade of red; he almost swallowed his cigar as he struggled to speak.

"Refugee from a pickle jar, am I?" he cried in a wheezy, sputtering voice. "And you're Terry Lester! And you're going to test a tin-can rocket ship that some crack-pot designed," he roared, gathering steam as he listed Terry's insults categorically. "Well, Mr. Terry Lester, I happen to be the crack-pot that designed the ship you're going to test and if you tear it to pieces I'll eat your hat without seasoning."

Terry laughed.

"I recognized you from your pictures, MacGregor. I heard you were excitable but I got a bum steer. You're damn near incandescent!"

He tossed his orders on MacGregor's desk and lit a cigarette while the crotchety engineer thumbed through them, a scowl on his red face.

MacGregor, Terry knew, was a living legend in the history of space travel. His contributions to the development of inter-planetary travel stretched over a span of almost fifty years. What he didn't know about shape ships, no one else in the Universe did either. And his knowledge, scientific brilliance and Scotch canniness were the subjects of a thousand stories, told and re-told in space-ports from Jupiter to Venus.

This was the dour, white-haired, hopping little man who sat behind the desk scowling at Terry's orders. Terry knew that his truculent belligerence was ninety-nine per cent pose to cover a streak of soft sentiment.

MacGREGOR finally glanced up from the papers, his keen old eyes bright in his small face.

"So you're Terry Lester, eh? Heard a lot about you. Suppose to be a pretty good man at the controls of a ship, aren't you?"

Terry shrugged.

"Good enough," he said.

"We'll see," MacGregor said. He leaned back in his chair and said, "What did the Federated Command kick you out for?"

"That's none of your damn business," Terry said evenly.

"Well, it don't matter," MacGregor said, getting up from his desk and tottering over to the door. He put a hand to his back and grimaced. "Darn this rheumatism!" In the same peevish, impersonal voice he said, "The Federated Command always was a little too uppity for my tastes." He squinted at Terry and laughed with a thin, high chuckle. "Threw me out of their research department forty-six years ago for telling a brass hat to go to hell."

Terry found himself warming to this twisted, grumpy old man. And he knew then why MacGregor had become a living legend. He was more than a magnificent engineer; he was a magnificent human being.

"I never heard that before," he said.

"Well," McGregor said wryly, "neither of us brags much about it. How 'bout taking a look at that tin can

of mine now?"

Terry followed the old man to the main mooring tower where a half dozen engineers and mechanics were working on a slim, beautiful ship, powered by four rear rockets. Stubby atomic cannons stuck out from the nose of the ship like the feelers of a bug.

MacGregor teetered back and forth, hands in his pockets, working his cigar from side to side in his mouth.

"There she is," he said.

Terry walked around the ship, inspecting it from every angle. There was a singing in his heart as he drank in the sheer perfection of the small ship. It was more than a creation of man's mind and ingenuity; it was the dream of a man's soul translated in lines of shining steel.

MacGregor watched him closely, eagerly, with his small bright eyes, when he completed his inspection.

"Well, what do you think?"

Terry let the enthusiasm fade from his face and he shrugged.

"It looks like a fair ship," he said cautiously. "No one's taken it out yet, have they?"

MacGregor shook his head.

"Nope. You'll be the first. It's ready to go anytime you feel like it."

"Stick it into a propulsion slot, then," Terry said. "There's no time like the present. I'll tell you in an hour or so if she's got anything besides good looks."

MacGregor's face lighted with a rare enthusiasm. He shouted an order to the crew working on the ship and slapped Terry on the arm.

"You do things the way I like—sudden as hell," he said.

TEN minutes later, wearing a borrowed space suit, Terry blasted off in MacGregor's fighter. A thousand miles above Earth, in the stark immensity of the void, he put the ship through its paces. At first he found it almost too delicate and fast to handle, but as his trained reflexes adjusted to its almost incredible maneuverability and velocity, a satisfied grin broke on his face.

What a ship!

There was nothing it couldn't do. Terry Lester had flown every type of ship in existence, from training fighters to great liners, but he'd never piloted anything like this quick-silver-fast ship of MacGregor's.

He took it out fifty thousand miles and dove it back toward Earth. The hair at the back of his neck rose as he watched the rate-of-speed needle revolve madly. He pulled it out of the dive a thousand miles above Earth, a few seconds later. He took a deep, unsteady breath. There was apparently no limit to the ship's speed.

Forty nine thousand miles in thirty seconds! *

That was traveling! At that speed a man didn't have time to check his reactions. He smiled at the thought of using the ship in actual combat. He trigged the force guns and watched the bright beams of energy lash out from the atomic cannons against the dead blackness of the void. An enemy ship would be a cinder in an instant under that searing blast.

He drove back to Earth and flashed the ship in a whistling screaming dive through Earth's atmosphere to test the friction resistance of the hull. He had seen ships melt into molten, shapeless lumps from the heat generated by atmospheric friction; but MacGregor's ship took it without difficulty.

He circled Earth once, then set the automatic mooring dial and brought the

* To eliminate the physical hazards produced by the tremendous acceleration necessary for such speeds, an inertia nullifier had been perfected by Keating in 2017, and which was standard equipment on all space ships.—Ed.

ship down. MacGregor was waiting at the base of the tower, hiding his anxiety behind a sarcastic smile.

"Well, it's still in one piece," he said.

Terry handed him the chart on which the reactions of the ship had been automatically recorded, and waited while the old Scotchman read them rapidly, tracing every waver of the reaction lines with keen eyes that missed nothing.

He shook his head grumpily. "Have to make an adjustment on the gravity-repeller. Too much strain. Won't take much to fix it right."

Glancing up at Terry, he couldn't hide his anxiety any longer. His bright, little eyes were frankly worried.

"How's she handle?" he asked.

TERRY didn't have the heart to hold him in suspense. He grinned and said, "There's nothing to worry about. She's perfect. If she were any faster you couldn't find pilots to handle her."

"Hmmph," MacGregor said, striving unsuccessfully to hide the pleased light in his eyes. "She's just another ship. You've been blasting around in tubs so long you forget the feel of a nice, trim little ship. But I guess she'll do."

"She'll do, all right," Terry said. "When do we take her to Mars?"

"Right away," MacGregor said emphatically.

"Are you going?" asked Terry.

"Hell's fire, yes!" the wiry Scotchman said explosively. "Did you think I'd trust anybody else to get that ship ready for flight? And I want to be on hand to watch them Martian double-crossers get run out of the void."

"Who else is going?" Terry asked.

"Just you, me, and the three-man commission from the Space Bureau," MacGregor said. "What they want them diplomats to go along for, I don't know. Not one of 'em knows a propulsion rocket from a mooring tower. But they're going, nevertheless. We'll leave from here at the end of the week and make the trip in the fighter. That'll give you that much time to get used to it."

"Fine," Terry said. "I'll be on hand."

BLAST-OFF was scheduled for Saturday morning, nine o'clock, Earth time, 296-04, Inter-planetary time. MacGregor's fighter was in its propulsion slot when Terry arrived.

He climbed into a pair of leather space togs, gave the ship a quick, thorough inspection, then opened the hatch and stepped into the small cabin.

MacGregor was there, talking with three persons whom Terry guessed to be the representatives from the Space Bureau who were making the trip with them. Two of the three were middle-aged, with graying hair; but when Terry glanced at the third figure, he couldn't repress a low exclamation of amazement.

MacGregor chuckled at the look on his face.

"Didn't figure the three-man commission might have a girl on the staff, did you?" he said, chuckling gleefully at Terry's discomfiture.

The girl was tall and slim. The strands of hair that escaped from her tightly fitting space helmet were a becoming shade of red. Her eyes were very blue in the whiteness of her face.

"Miss Masters," MacGregor said, "our pilot, Terry Lester."

"How do you do?" the girl murmured in a low voice. She didn't smile and Terry noticed that her eyes were without warmth. She looked cold, superior and there was a suggestion in her attitude that the bare cabin of the fighter was not quite her customary environment.

Terry nodded shortly to her, making no attempt to conceal his dislike. She was a type he couldn't stomach. Cold, stiff and superior.

He shook hands with the two men and learned that the younger of the two was Mr. Neelson, and the other Mr. Forrest. They were both cordial and looked alert and efficient.

"How soon do we leave?" Terry asked, turning to MacGregor.

"When you say the word," MacGregor answered. "Everything's all set. The supplies are aboard. I checked everything myself, personally."

The girl stood up and said to MacGregor, "Is Mr. Lester a Federated Command pilot?"

Terry noticed that the top of her head came about level with his eyes. And he also noticed that the tailored trousers and jacket she wore accentuated the slim, feminine lines of her body.

MacGregor cocked his head and looked at her with a strange lack of expression on his round, wrinkled face.

"What makes you ask that, Miss Masters?" he asked.

Terry watched the scene with a bitter, ironic smile that pressed his lips into flat, white lines.

"I'll tell her, Mac," he said quietly. He turned to the girl and smiled without humor. "I was a Federation officer, Miss Masters, but they threw me out. Since you undoubtedly knew that, what was the point of your question?"

"Yes," the girl said, "I knew of your past record, Mr. Lester." Her eyes met his coolly, levelly. "I simply wanted to remind you that the Space Bureau Commission, of which I am a member, is aware of your background."

"I see," Terry said, and his voice was dangerously soft. "You'll be watching to see that I don't sell out to the Martians, is that it?"

"Precisely," the girl said calmly. "I didn't approve of your selection from the start, but I was over-ruled by the Federated Command. I insisted that we use one of their accredited, trustworthy pilots. Why they didn't is something I still can't understand."

TERRY'S burnished features were rock-hard, but before he could speak, MacGregor said to the girl, "There's probably a lot of things you don't understand, Miss Masters, judging from the stuff comin' through those sweet lips of yours." The cigar in his mouth shifted angrily from side to side and his little eyes were snapping bright. "Terry Lester's aboard because he's the best damn pilot in the Universe. This is a time when Earth can't stand on formality. She's got to have the best men she's got, whether they're wearing cute red uniforms or convict stripes. When the Martian pilots learn they're flying against Terry they'll be ready to quit before they hit the void." He paused and spat contemptuously. "I hope them skirts of yours make as good an impression."

Terry saw the high spots of angry color in the girl's cheeks and he couldn't repress a reluctant admiration for her tenacity. Wrong as she was, she was sticking to her guns. And maybe, he thought with a mental shrug, she wasn't wrong at that.

"I refuse to be intimidated by your attitude, Mr. MacGregor," she said quietly.

Terry noticed with a faint grin that the two men—Neelson and Forrest—were looking rather embarassed.

"Well," he said, with a slight mocking nod to the girl, "now that the spotlight has been turned on the black sheep, suppose we get started."

He turned and strode into the control chamber and in a few seconds the powerful rear rockets were throbbing gently.

MacGregor came in and stood behind him as he rapidly checked the instruments.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

Terry nodded. "Fine."

The old Scotchman laid a hand awkwardly on his shoulder.

"Don't let that dame get you down." he said. "The best of women are odd gadgets," he added, shaking his white head despairingly. "They're the only things in God's Universe that violate the laws of mechanics and science. That's why I never got married. Couldn't stand to have somethin' around that wouldn't fit into an equation."

Terry felt the bitter core of anger in his breast dissolving slowly.

"That's your story," he smiled. "The truth is, none of them would have you."

MacGregor chuckled.

"That's been my secret for forty years," he said. "And now you come along and dig it out."

"Here we go," Terry said.

His hand moved to the release switch and closed it firmly. A second later the fighter rocketed from its tower and split the Earth's atmosphere with a shrieking roar as it blasted for the measureless void. . . .

THE trip to Mars took a day and a half. Terry cut the speed of the fighter when he saw the red orb of Mars in the small visi-screen which was at eye-level above the control panel.

He was watching closely the reaction of the repulsion rocket gauges when the door opened and the Masters girl entered. Terry hadn't spoken to her since the start of the flight. And he didn't bother to speak now. He was conscious of her eyes on his back, but he kept his attention on the control panel.

"When will we reach Mars?" she asked finally.

"Pretty soon," Terry said.

"Will I have time for a shower?"

Terry kept his face straight.

"Depends on how badly you need one," he said.

He heard the girl's sharp, angry intake of breath and a smile brushed the corners of his mouth. The door banged and when he glanced up she had gone.

With a malicious grin on his face he suddenly gunned the throttle and drove the ship toward Mars at full speed. Three minutes after the girl had left the room they were splitting the atmosphere of Mars. A light flared on the visi-screen—a signal from the Martian space port—and he set his instruments accordingly. A minute later the ship had come to a cushioned stop in Martian tower. . . .

TERRY set the controls at neutral and stepped into the cabin of the ship. MacGregor was releasing the compressed air vents that opened the hatch. Nelson and Forrest were at his side. There was no sign of the girl. From the rear compartment of the ship Terry heard the sound of running water and he rubbed a hand over his mouth to hide a quick smile.

When the hatch opened two Martians who had been standing on the tower ramp stepped into the ship. They were a little over four feet high, a dull red in color and their flat, disc-like faces were adorned with polite smiles.

"So happy to welcome you to our planet," one of them murmured. He was the heavier of the two and his eyes were bright, hard, unrevealing. "I am Ogar, chief of Mars' research division. My assistant, Melthar."

The Martian named Melthar bowed and smiled. Introductions were exchanged. Ogar's pale green eyes narrowed for an instant when he saw Terry.

"I know of you by reputation, I believe," he said. "You had an unfortunate encounter with one of our patrols a few years ago, if I am not mistaken."

"It was an unfortunate encounter for your patrol," Terry said.

"Ah, yes," Ogar said, smiling blandly. "But such things will happen." He glanced at MacGregor, then at Forrest and Neelson, and a politely puzzled frown appeared on his face. "We understood another was coming," he said gently.

"Oh, yes," MacGregor said, "but don't worry, we're all accounted for. The other member——"

He stopped in mid-sentence as the door opened and the Masters girl appeared. She was wearing a loose bath robe and her long red hair was covered with white lather. Her eyes were closed tightly and one hand was extended gopingly in front of her.

"Will somebody hand me a towel, please?" she asked. "I don't want to get this darn lather in my eyes.'

MacGregor stared at her for an instant and then he slapped a calloused palm down on his thigh. A thin, high chuckle broke through his lips and his shoulders began to shake.

Neelson and Forrest were smiling and suddenly the two Martians joined in the laughter, their voices tittering in high-pitched giggles.

The girl opened her eyes and a blank look of amazement spread over her features as she stared in confusion at the two Martians. She drew the robe together at her throat with a fluttering, nervous gesture and she backed toward the rear compartment door in an agony of embarrassment.

Terry watched the scene gravely. His sudden acceleration in landing had caught the girl in this humiliating spot; and while he felt she deserved it, he got no satisfaction from the thought.

A bright, painful flush stained her cheeks.

"I'm sorry," she said breathlessly, "I didn't know we were——" Her voice trailed weakly. "I'll be ready in a minute," she said. "I thought——"

She met Terry's eyes then and slow comprehension dawned in her face. The embarrassed flush on her cheeks was heightened by a blaze of anger.

"I hope you're amused!" she cried, and disappeared into the rear compartment, slamming the door behind her with unmistakable emphasis.

OGAR, the Martian, turned to MacGregor.

"All arrangements have been made for your accommodations," he said. "You will have the facilities of our space ships at your command, should you need them. And if you want mechanics or technicians, we shall be happy to supply them also."

"Thanks," said MacGregor dryly, "but I think we'll manage okay ourselves."

"As you wish," Ogar said politely. "The tests are scheduled for tomorrow. Will that be convenient for you?"

MacGregor glanced at Terry.

"How about it, son? Tomorrow okay with you?"

Terry nodded.

"I'll be ready."

"Excellent," said Ogar, smiling. "We shall leave you now. When you are ready to leave, there will be someone here to take you to your quarters. You should all enjoy a restful sleep. Tomorrow will be a busy day."

"You're right," Terry said. "Your pilots are liable to find things a bit too busy."

Ogar smiled at him, displaying even little teeth.

"Let us hope not," he said.

TERRY was on the great Martian space field at day-break the following morning. He inspected MacGregor's fighter carefully and found it in perfect condition. The ship was set in an open tower, visible to the dozens of pilots who were arriving at the field. Many came over to glance at the trim ship: great, one-eyed men from Jupiter, the delicate, small-boned citizens of Venus, and Martians, all crowded around like chattering monkeys, inspecting every gadget and discussing each separate section of the ship among themselves in their baffling native tongue.

Terry didn't mind the others. The inhabitants of Jupiter were slow, solemn men who apparently worried about nothing. Their planet was beyond the reach of any attack and they seemed to realize it. The Venusians were pleasant and polite. Their planet was protected by a force shield whose energy was supplied by a metal peculiar to Venus; they lived secluded, quiet lives behind their artificial barrier, neither seeking nor desiring contact with other planets of the Universe. They attended space conferences out of a sense of duty.

The Martians, however, bothered Terry. He knew they were preparing to hurl an attack at Earth, probably their first in an attempt to dominate the entire solar system. And their greed was mirrored in their small, flat eyes as they whispered among themselves and stared speculatively at each detail of MacGregor's slim, deadly fighter.

MacGregor arrived a few minutes later, with Ogar trotting at his heels.

"How's everything?" he asked.

"Looks okay," Terry said. "When does the fun start?"

"I'll make a check myself," MacGregor said. "Never yet saw a pilot who knew how to inspect a ship. If all the rockets are in place they jump in and blast off." He shook his head disgustedly and Terry grinned.

"Go ahead," he said.

Ogar said quietly, "If it is convenient for you, my pilots are ready now. You have infra-film in your cannons, yes?"

"Not yet," MacGregor said grumpily, "I'm goin' to put the photographic apparatus in right now. Send your boys up. Terry'll catch 'em."

"Excellent," Ogar said, with a hissing intake of breath that gave a sibilant sound to the word. "There will be two of our ships in the first trial. They will rendezvous at two thousand miles above our atmosphere and wait for you." He smiled politely. "You may then use your own discretion, Mr. Lester."

"Wait a minute," MacGregor said, "what's the idea of two ships?"

Ogar smiled and shrugged.

"If Mr. Lester succeeds in eliminating one, there will be another for him to engage. Since all the ships are equipped with high-speed cameras instead of guns, it doesn't make much difference."

"That's right," Terry said, "the more the merrier."

MacGregor put his hands in his pockets and rocked slightly on his heels. His little eyes were sharp and bright.

"Just as a formality," he drawled, "I'd sorta like to take a look at the cameras your pilots are using."

Ogar bowed.

"But of course," he said. "Will you come with me?"

MACGREGOR returned in about ten minutes, shaking his white head

disgustedly. He was alone.

"Whats' the matter?" asked Terry. "Find a few concealed cannons in their ships?"

"That's just the trouble," the little Scotchman answered sourly. "I didn't." He spat a wad of tobacco juice on the ground and ran a hand irritably through his scant white hair. "It ain't natural," he growled. "Them little red snakes are trying to pull something funny, but I can't figure what. Watch yourself boy, every second up there."

"I'll be careful," Terry said.

MacGregor clambered into the ship and, a few minutes later, called Terry.

"Everything's set," he said, peering about the control chamber in a last-minute check. "Your cameras are ready, but I'm sorry you ain't using cannons."

Terry slid into the control seat and glanced at the panel and visi-screen.

"Don't worry, Pop," he grinned. "I'll be all right."

"I know," MacGregor said, but his bright eyes were troubled.

"How's our three-man commission coming along?" Terry asked dryly.

"Okay, I guess. Ogar's been winin' and dinin' 'em like visiting royalty. They seem to be enjoying everything to the limit."

"That's just great," said Terry bitterly. He closed the firing switch with a vicious gesture and spoke above the sudden humming of the rear rockets. "We do the work while they have the fun." The rockets were thundering now and the slim ship was trembling, so Terry said, "You'd better clear out, Pop, unless you want to go for a loop-the-loop in space."

"My insides couldn't stand it," MacGregor grinned. He patted Terry on the shoulder and said, "Luck." Then he was gone.

Terry sealed the hatch a moment later and when he heard the hissing sound of the compressed air fade away, he signaled for clearance.

When the Central tower flashed him an okay he closed the release switch and, with an exhilarating rush of power, the slim ship blasted void-ward.

Terry cut his speed at two thousand miles and circled until he came in sight of the Martian ships. They were waiting motionlessly for him, about two miles apart—long black ships, with flaring fins and the insignia of the Martian space corps gleaming in red from their sides.

Terry dove between them, saluting as he passed, then circled and came back slowly, ready for action.

He slanted toward the closer ship, expecting it to roll away in a dive. But it remained motionless as he came in, a perfect target for his fore automatic cannons. If his guns were loaded, he could have burned the ship to a cinder in that second.

The Martian ship swung about slowly to meet him and, at that instant, Terry experienced a sixth-sense of danger, an intuitive warning that something was wrong. There was something phony in this set-up.

Instinctively he threw his ship to one side, then shoved the throttle forward to hurl his fighter out of the range of the idling Martian ship.

And he was not a second too soon!

FROM the stubby cannons on the nose of the Martian ship a sudden orange blast flashed toward him like a giant spear. His instinctive maneuver saved him by a foot. The blast streaked over his ship and he felt his cabin grow suddenly hot from the searing heat of its passage. Had he continued on his former course he would have been burned to a crisp.

He felt a cold bitter rage coursing

through his veins. The Martian ships were armed and prepared to fight a battle to the death. They knew he was helpless and they were closing in like hungry sharks.

The ship that had fired was following him in a dive, and a glance in his rear visi-screen showed Terry that the second ship was streaking to join the attack.

Terry cursed bitterly. The Martians must have installed the atomic blasts after MacGregor had inspected their ships. He couldn't figure out their purpose in destroying his ship. They were obviously ready for war with Earth if they'd pull a stunt like this. But he didn't have any more time to worry about the designs of the Martians.

He had all he could do to keep himself from being seared into nothingness by the stabbing blasts of atomic energy that were hurtling at him from the pursuing Martian fighters.

He pulled the ship from its dive and roared void-ward. And it was only the incredible speed of MacGregor's fighter that saved him. In a few minutes his rear visi-screen was blank and he knew he had left them thousands of miles in his wake.

He tried his communication equipment but it was dead. He wasn't surprised. The Martians hadn't missed a trick. Somehow, during the night, they had managed to sabotage his space radio set to prevent him from communicating with Earth.

He circled in a slow wide arc, trying to bring order to the jumbled thoughts in his mind. He didn't have enough rocket current to make the trip back to Earth; and he wouldn't run out on MacGregor if he could. He wondered fleetingly about the Masters girl. She was in a tough spot. The Martians were notorious for their treatment of prisoners, especially if they happened to be women. He'd have to do what he could for her.

He suddenly shook his head. What was wrong? He seemed to be getting dizzy. Then he glanced at the oxygen meter and he knew what was wrong. His oxygen supply was almost exhausted.

The Martians hadn't forgotten a thing. They had given him just enough oxygen to reach the void and now that was gone. He'd black out in a minute or so, and crash.

There was only one alternative. He swung the nose of the ship over and dove for Mars at full speed, praying he'd make the mooring tower before he passed out. . . .

HE DID. But when he opened the hatchway and stumbled from the ship, drinking the air into his tortured lungs, Melthar, the Martian, was waiting for him with a ray gun in his hand and four similarly armed guards standing beside him.

"You came back in a hurry, didn't you?" Melthar smiled.

Terry leaned against the hull of his ship, breathing deeply, feeling the strength return slowly to his body. He looked at Melthar and made no effort to keep the black hatred he was feeling from showing in his face.

"You weren't taking any chances, were you?" he said. "You didn't think the odds were enough in your favor, did you? One unarmed ship against two of your fighters was too much like an even thing to suit you. You had to drain off my oxygen, reduce my rocket current and put my space radio out of commission, then you felt fairly certain that things would be all right." He smiled coldly into the little Martian's face. "You'll regret this, my little friend."

"You will come with me," Melthar said. He gave no indication that he had heard Terry. "Quickly, please." He stepped aside and gestured imperiously with his gun.

Terry was led to an elaborately furnished office in the vast, gleaming structure that housed the Martians' general staff. When the door was opened, Terry saw Ogar sitting behind a large desk, smiling pleasantly.

At one side of the desk stood MacGregor and the Masters girl. There were alert guards stationed at all four walls of the room.

"Welcome, my friend," Ogar said, smiling brightly at Terry. "I'm glad you are able to join our party. Although," he added, with a doleful shake of his head, "we didn't really expect you."

"I imagine not," Terry said in a clipped, hard voice. "Those buzzards of yours were supposed to shoot me down, weren't they? They should have had an easy thing."

"Yes," said Ogar thoughtfully, "they were very careless to miss you. But," he said, with another bright smile, "they have paid for their carelessness by this time. I have ordered them put to death."

"You rotten snake!" MacGregor said explosively. His hands were clenched and there was a wrathful glint in his bright eyes. He swung to Terry and his white hair fell over his eyes. He shoved it angrily away.

"This filthy runt thinks he's going to keep us here as prisoners. I told him there'll be twenty thousand Earth ships over Mars in a week if he doesn't let us go."

Ogar smiled. "I hardly think so," he said. "In the first place, Earth doesn't know yet that you are our prisoners. They shall not know until we give them the information."

THE Masters girl stepped forward and her small chin was set grimly.

"You are making a definite mistake," she said firmly. "Mr. Neelson and Mr. Forrest have been in communication with Earth since our arrival. The authorities on Earth know precisely what we are doing and if they do not receive regular bulletins from us, their suspicions will be aroused immediately."

"Ah!" Ogar drew a deep slow breath and regarded the slender girl with veiled eyes. "I don't like to shatter your naive confidence," he murmured, "but none of the bulletins your associates sent was delivered. We took the liberty of intercepting them and consigning them to oblivion. And as for Mr. Neelson and Mr. Forrest, they no longer concern us."

"What do you mean?" the girl asked tensely.

Ogar smiled. "I dislike being blunt. I was hoping to spare your feelings, but the two gentlemen who accompanied you have ceased to exist. Their usefulness came to an end an hour or so ago, consequently they were destroyed."

The girl stepped back a pace as if she had been struck a hard blow in the face. She pressed one hand to her mouth and her eyes were wide with horror.

"You fiend!" she gasped.

Ogar inclined his head to her in a mocking bow.

"Thank you," he said.

"Let's talk sense," Terry said curtly. "You've gone pretty far already, Ogar, but there may still be a chance to save your neck. If you start a war with Earth, you'll be smashed in two weeks. A hundred of Earth's new fighter ships could blast your space fleet out of the void. I proved that a half hour ago. I left your ships standing still. If I'd had guns you wouldn't have had to execute your pilots; I'd have saved you the job."

Ogar listened intently, nodding his head slowly and smiling a deliberate smile.

"There is truth in what you say," he murmured. "We would be in an unhappy position if Earth had a hundred of her new fighters. But she hasn't; I know that, and so do you. We know that the ship you brought here is an experimental fighter, that Earth can't produce them at high speed for several years. We aren't going to wait that long. We are striking tomorrow morning, simultaneously at five Earth bases. You and Mr. MacGregor will be detained here to assist our laboratories in studying your marvellous fighter. Soon we shall be able to produce a ship of that type in great quantity; and we will rule the solar system." He spread his small delicate hands in a bland gesture. "So you see we're not worried about the outcome of our war with Earth, for we know how weak she is."

Ogar's words had been like fists landing against Terry's face but he kept his face expressionless.

"I don't know from what source you get your information," he said grimly, "but I'd advise you to check it again. If you think our ship is an experimental fighter, just wait until you hit the first defenses of Earth. You'll see a hundred more of them and those ships will be armed. Your pilots aren't going to like that very much, Ogar. They prefer combat against unarmed ships."

"Your bluff won't work," Ogar said, shaking his head and smiling. "You see, I got my information from Miss Masters. She was tactless enough to admit that the ship was an experimental one." He glanced at the girl and smiled mockingly. "Allow me to thank you, my dear."

TERRY looked at the girl and he knew from her painfully flushed face that the Martian wasn't lying. She met his eyes entreatingly.

"I didn't mean to," she said in an anguished voice.

Terry's face hardened with bitterness and he looked away from her white, drawn face without speaking.

"You must believe me," the girl cried. She took MacGregor's arm in her hands but he shook her off roughly.

"It's done," he said bitterly. "Forget it."

Ogar stood up and smiled gently at the girl.

"I wouldn't let their unsociable attitude worry you, Miss Masters," he said. "I will be your friend and you will find me extremely sociable." He motioned to two of the guards and nodded to the girl. "Take her to my quarters."

The girl shuddered as the grinning Martian guards approached.

The guards were reaching for her when MacGregor suddenly wheeled and struck one of them in the face with all his strength. His small wrinkled face was white with fury. The guard fell backward to the floor and jerked his ray gun from his belt.

Before Terry could take a step an orange ray stabbed upward from the gun and MacGregor clutched suddenly at his breast. He staggered once, his face twisted with pain and then he fell in a crumpled heap to the floor, as if his muscles had shriveled to nothingness.

Terry dropped to the side of the old Scotchman, but when he turned him over, he saw that he was dead. There was a soft contented expression on the old man's features, as if in death the kindness and sentiment hidden deep in his heart had come to the surface and transfigured his face.

He knelt beside the twisted figure of the old man and the scalding tears in his eyes almost blinded him. Hatred

was a live thing in him, searing him with its helpless bitterness.

He looked up and saw that six of the small Martian guards were surrounding him, weapons in hands, tense, watchful expressions on their faces.

"His death is regrettable," Ogar said coldly. "The guard will be punished. But I'd advise you not to repeat his mistake."

He gestured sharply to the guards and they closed in slowly on Terry. "Take him to the dungeons below."

Terry stood up slowly and dully. His eyes met those of the girl and his hands clenched into fists as he thought of what she had done.

He said, "I hope you consider this a good day's work," and the charged bitterness in his voice was like a hard slap across her face. She flushed and turned her eyes away.

Terry was led from the room by the squad of six guards. . . .

HE LAY on a small dank cot, unable to sleep, unable to rest. He had changed his position a dozen times in the last hour. The cell was dark, stifling, with no opening save the one barred door.

His mind was like a squeezed sponge, dry of thought or hope or sensation. He had tried to think of some way to escape, to warn Earth of the impending Martian attack; he had tried until his brain hurt and there was a bright patch of pain under each eye.

He had been locked in the dungeon for several hours. How many he could not be sure. There were no guards he could see in the corridor. They evidently believed there was no chance of his escaping the tight little dungeon.

And it looked as if they were right. He had inspected every inch of the foul hole and had found nothing that he could use in an escape. The door was securely bolted from the outside. He had slammed into it a dozen times with the full weight of his body, but the only results had been a bruised, aching shoulder.

He shifted his position again and stared despairingly into the darkness. He thought of MacGregor's death and it was like a cold hand closing over his stomach.

He had known the little Scotchman for only a few days but, in that time, the man had come to seem like the father he had never known.

He heard a faint sound outside his cell door and, in an instant, he had swung his feet off the cot to stand in the darkness of the cell, every muscle tensed. He was determined to take any chance that might present itself—regardless of how slim it might be.

The bolts slid back slowly, creaking in their sockets, and he felt rather than saw the narrow, barred door swing quietly open.

He stepped forward on the balls of his toes, moving lightly as a cat. There was a dim form visible in the doorway and he lunged forward suddenly, both hands outstretched.

One hand closed over a soft mouth, cutting off a fearful exclamation, and his other hand dug into a bare shoulder that was brushed by long, smooth hair.

The creature in his steel grip was a woman!

He released the hand over her mouth and her voice, a low, terrified whisper, was in his ears. "Please, Terry; it's Dale. Dale Masters."

He took his hands from her, too surprised to speak. He could see her face only as a dim white triangle, but her eyes, close to his, were luminous and bright.

"What do you want here?" he asked, when he had recovered from shocked surprise.

"I came here to help you," she whispered. "We haven't much time."

TERRY felt a quick hard suspicion, and he said, "How did you get here? What kind of a game are you playing?"

"You must believe me," the girl said, and her low whisper was desperate with urgency. "I know you hate me. I've acted like a fool. I'm responsible for the trouble you're in, but don't think of that now, please. We have a chance to get away if we work together."

"How did you get here?" Terry asked again. The urgent appeal in the girl's voice was realistic, but he was still not completely convinced.

"I can't tell you everything now," the girl said frantically. "But Ogar came to me tonight. I—I pretended to like him. I even let him hold me in his arms." Terry felt her convulsive shudder as she leaned against him, and her voice broke in a dry sob. "It was hideous. But it was the only way I could get the gun at his waist. I drew it and shot him. Then I came here. I killed another guard at the end of this corridor. We're only a few dozen feet from the tower where our ship is moored. The way is clear now. If we leave immediately, we may have a chance to make it."

"Have you still got the gun?" Terry asked quickly.

She pressed it into his hand and he felt a new surge of confidence as he felt its slim, deadly weight in his palm. He patted the girl's shoulder.

"Come on," he said, "If you're lying, may God help you."

Together they left the cell and hurried down the black corridor.

The girl led him through the darkness, past several intersecting corridors and finally to the door that opened on the great Martian space field.

It took Terry several seconds to accustom his eyes to the murky illumination of the stars, but then he saw the slim hull of MacGregor's fighter silhouetted against the faint brightness of the night sky.

They had to cross a patch of open ground a dozen yards wide to reach it, and Terry could see, in the shadow of the ship, several Martians lounging there, on guard.

"We've got to take a chance," he whispered in the girl's ear. "Start walking with me toward the ship. When they see us, get behind me and run toward the ship as fast as you can."

He stepped through the door and started for the ship. The girl was at his side. They covered half the distance before one of the guards detached himself and stepped out, challenging them in his high, reedy voice.

Terry didn't answer. He caught the girl's hand and walked steadily on toward the ship, cutting a yard of the distance with every stride. When they were within ten feet of the ship, the guard called out excitedly to his companions and reached for the gun at his belt.

"Get behind me!" Terry snapped to the girl.

He raised the gun in his hand and drilled the guard with a livid orange blast. He fell without a cry, but the other guards began to yell frantically.

Terry swung his gun on them and two blasts flashed from its muzzle, scattering the guards in four directions.

"Run!" Terry shouted.

He charged toward the ship, dodging and weaving, but the Martians didn't fire. They were evidently too surprised and frightened by his sudden appearance to organize an effective resistance.

THE side hatch of the ship was open. Terry scrambled in, pulled the girl

after him and slammed the heavy door. He jerked the switch that sealed it with hundreds of pounds of compressed air, then streaked for the control chamber. He snapped on a light and checked the instruments as he reached for the release switch. The oxygen tanks had been filled, the rocket current was charged to capacity and even the atomic cannons were loaded. The Martians had evidently completely restocked the ship for their own experimental purpose.

The hum of the rockets grew in volume and at the same time he heard the heavy, thudding blows being rained on the solid surface of the hatch door.

He grinned and opened the throttle. The little red men were just a bit too late. The ship trembled for an instant and then it blasted itself from the gravity of Mars, streaking void-ward, a pin-point of searing light against the immensity of dark space.

Terry settled back in his seat and studied the rear visi-screen. Visible in it was a long, gleaming line of fighterships, in blast-off formation, on the Martian space field.

The girl came to his side, her eyes anxious.

"Ogar said the Martian fleet would attack Earth tomorrow," she said. "Can't we communicate with Earth and warn them of the danger."

"I don't think that's going to be necessary," Terry said, with a grim smile. He grinned up at her. "What did you say your first name was?"

"Dale."

"Well, Dale, I don't know if you've ever shot ducks on water, but you're going to see something pretty close to that right now."

He glanced up at the line of Martian fighters on the visi-screen and then swung his ship about in a tight roll and dove back toward Mars. He cut his speed and came over the great space field at an angle that brought the long, gleaming line of hundreds of ships directly into the range of his atomic cannons.

He triggered the guns viciously and the spearing blasts of powerful energy raked the line of ships as he flashed over them. The searing atomic beams cut through the ships of the Martian fleet like a hot knife through butter. And when Terry pointed the nose of MacGregor's fighter void-ward again, there wasn't a ship of the great Martian attacking force that would ever strike out into space again.

Terry glanced at Dale as their ship screamed through Mars' atmosphere to begin the long trip back to Earth.

He grinned. "That," he said, "is known as offensive sabotage."

"It was magnificent," Dale said quietly.

Terry patted her shoulder.

"I guess I owe you an apology," he said simply. "You're pretty magnificent yourself."

A WEEK later Terry stood before Commander Moore's desk, at rigid attention.

"There is nothing I can say," the commander said, glancing up at him, "there is nothing anyone can say that will adequately express the gratitude the people of Earth owe you, Terry Lester."

He fumbled among the papers and picked out a bulky envelope. He extended it toward Terry.

"This is small enough payment," he said.

Terry colored slightly. "I told you, sir, that I didn't want any money for what I did."

"Take it anyway," Commander Moore said.

Terry opened the envelope with stiff

fingers. There was no money inside. There was an engraved piece of paper, stamped with the seal of the Federated Command. It stated that Terrence Lester was again a member of the Command, reinstated for services above and beyond the call of duty.

Terry had difficulty swallowing as he looked down at the commander.

"You may not care to accept it," the commander said; "but we're hoping you will come back to us."

"It's what I've always wanted," Terry said. He put the paper in his pocket and grinned awkwardly. "It's too bad MacGregor isn't here," he said. "Maybe he could have been reinstated too."

Commander Moore looked puzzled. "MacGregor? Reinstated?" He shook his head. "Hardly possible, since he was never a member of the Federated Command. We tried hard enough to get him, but he always said our uniforms looked like monkey suits."

Terry swallowed a sudden lump in his throat. MacGregor had told him the story of being thrown out of the Federated Command just to buck him up, when he needed it more than anything else in the world.

"I—I forgot," he said. He patted the pocket that held his reinstatement paper and said, "Thank you, sir. I'll be ready for duty whenever you need me."

He walked toward the door and fumbled blindly for the handle. Dale was waiting for him in the reception room and when she saw him, she rose and came to his side eagerly. He smiled at her and they left together.

FREQUENCY TUNING SCIENCE

By Cpl. KING KEILLOR

THE science of electronics is speedily bringing our civilization to that glorious dream-world of the science-fiction addict. The end of the war will be the "Go" signal for a whole host of new devices which will, according to well-informed predictors, change the habits of Man and remake the face of the world.

The field of electronics is a vast one, but most of the branches are based on certain principles involving the action of the Electron, that tiny, theoretical "whatsit" which moves at the speed of light in quantities such as the standard Ampere which is determined to be 6,280,000,000,000,000,000 electrons moving past a point in one second. It is this electronic movement that is the *basis of radio transmission and reception and all* other electrical devices.

When the rate of electron flow is varying regularly in direction we have Alternating Current, whose action enables us to produce so many amazing electronic phenomena. The rate at which our alternating current goes through a complete cycle of direction is called Frequency, and these frequencies may be anywhere from one per second to 3,000,000,000,000,000,000, cycles per second, and *upward.* There are ways and means of generating a desired frequency by means of mechanical action and use of the vacuum tube; and there is a means of assorting signals of different frequencies when many of them are being received at the same time. The means by which these different frequencies are assorted or picked out for particular use is the *Resonant Circuit* which we use every time we turn the dial of our radio tuner.

The Resonant Circuit consists of two electronic devices which react differently to different frequency rates of current. The first of these is the Inductor, which offers a high impedance* to *high* frequency CURRENT, and a *low* impedance to *low* frequency. That is, the strength of this impedance varies directly with the frequency, so that each different frequency will produce a different amount of impedance or resistive force. Thus, if we try to pass a current of high frequency through an inductor, we would just be acting kind *of silly.*

The second gadget we find in our resonant circuit is the *Capacitor,* or condenser, as it is more commonly called. This condenser reacts differently to different frequencies, even as the inductor does, only the condenser offers a *high* impedance to *low* frequency current, and a *low* impedance to a *high* frequency.

When we put the two doojiggers in the same circuit we "tune" the circuit to a current of a definite frequency. We put the inductor and the capacitor in the same circuit, and the current of *one particular frequency will* cause an *equal* impedance in both inductor and capacitor. There *has* to be a frequency at which the two impedance

forces are equal because the amount of impedance depends on the frequency; one impedance increasing with frequency increase, and the other decreasing with frequency increase. Therefore, in the resonant circuit we have set up, one certain frequency will cause both impedances to be equal, while all other frequencies which try to enter the circuit will be blocked by either the inductor or the capacitor. The current of the frequency to which the circuit is resonant, or tuned will just ooze through the circuit as free as a breeze, for when these two impedances are equal, they cancel each other out. So the one frequency which is the hero of our tale will pass into another stage to a vacuum tube where we can make use of in producing sound or some other phenomena.*

When our radio receiving set is tuned to a certain radio station which is featuring Buck Rogers, in "Lost on Jupiter," we will find our friend the Resonant Circuit at the bottom of the whole affair.

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Elements of Radio—Marcus & Horton
Radio Amateurs' Handbook—A.R.R.L. League

**(Author's note) For the purpose of our clearer understanding, let us consider impedance as simple electrical resistance, or opposition to current flow. Actually it is a bit more complex than this.*

MATH SCIENCE IN ELECTRONICS

By Cpl. KING KEILLOR

IN THE field of Electronics there are places for men and women of all grades of mental ability. A person who can grasp a few of the weighty ideas of mathematics has a good chance of understanding electronics, for the electronics technician not only knows how to read meters, but can set up a terrific jumble of hieroglyphics to get the same results. But don't let the math bogey faze you if you want to understand electronics, because you'd be amazed to see how quickly you can learn the stuff if you half try.

One of the first brain bouts you would have in studying electronics would be with the Ohm's Law formula which is simply $E = IR$, where E is the voltage applied, I is the current, and R is the resistance in an electrical circuit. With this formula you can measure any two of the quantities, and figure out the third, for if $E = IR$, then I equals E over R, and R equals E over I. This little mathematical gadget may look pretty simple, but don't underestimate; it has a potential complexity in circuits that has often made a fellow want to stomp on it furiously.

There is another fairly simple one for finding power losses. This one is P equals EI, with the same method of application as the OHM'S Law formula.

The old noodle has to shift into high gear where series and parallel circuits are involved, for like as not, you're liable to bump into this one: R_t equals 1 over (1 over R plus 1 over R squared plus 1 over R to the third power). This is used for finding resistance in parallel branches of a circuit. Of course this also lends itself to juggling, as do the previous two formulas. In fact, just about all of the electronic formulas are used with terms switched back and forth on each side of the equation, and sometimes you have to figure ways of switching them from bottom to top and vice versa. This definitely insinuates that you certainly can use a knowledge of alegbra in electronics.

That's only the beginning, though. Pretty soon you come head-on into Alternating Current, used with a couple of strange devices called the Inductor and the Capacitor. These effect an electronic phenomena which can only be explained by using Vectors, which are mathematical quantities having *direction* as well as magnitude. This direction factor makes it necessary for us to learn a new way to add, subtract, and multiply. This all comes very easy, except when we have to brush up on our trigonometry to figure out what those vectors are doing there before our very eyes.

When you figure electronic problems you merely have to know how to use a slide rule and Powers of Ten. Besides the use of logarithms, these are just about all an electronics technician has to learn about MATHEMATICS. If you feel like learning it all next week, you might look up the book, Mathematics For Electricians and Radiomen, by Lieutenant Cooke.

SCIENCE IN WAR

By S/Sgt. A. MORRIS

IT IS a fact that the U. S. is the greatest financial patron of scientific research in the world with the possible exception of Russia. This is learned from the National Resources Planning Board whose report states that we have been spending approximately $300,000,000 each year for the various fields of research. This work is carried on by 70,000 technicians and scientists working in the finest laboratories that money and scentific skill can build. When you consider our efforts in the interest of science during our more peaceful days, you can realize why we can produce so magnificently for war in such a short time.

Percy came striding out of the flames, two limp figures in his arms.

WARBURTON'S INVENTION

By Pvt. RUSSELL STORM

ILLUSTRATED BY J. ALLEN ST. JOHN

Warburton invented a robot—and the parts that went into him weighed 320 pounds; yet after assembly he weighed 312. Why?

"WAIT a minute, buddy," the fellow said, coming up along the bar. "I got a proposition I want to talk over with you."

He was a thin-faced Joe with a lower jaw that didn't come up high enough to meet the rest of his face. His clothes were good, but they were too expensive, and he was wearing them with a dash that I didn't exactly like. Taking a second look, I saw something else about him that I liked less than the clothes—a slight bulge under his left armpit.

"What's on your mind?"

He looked me over closely, the dull glitter of yellow flecks showing in his eyes. He was doubtful about me, uncertain, not quite satisfied with me.

"You're Herky Coyne, ain't you?"

"If it's anything to you—yes."

"You work for Warburton, don't you?"

The go-to-hell tone of his voice lifted the hair along the back of my neck.

"What's it to you?"

I'm not the toughest guy on earth, not by a hell of a lot of fellows, but I was tough enough for this cookie. He changed his tone fast. "You don't need to get tough. But you do work for Warburton, don't you? I gotta be sure."

There was no reason why I should deny working for Tom Warburton. Hell, I was proud of it. I admit some people thought Tom was crazy and others thought he was a dangerous radical who ought, for the peace and safety of the commonplace, to be hustled off to some Siberia, but I didn't hold any such views. To me, Tom Warburton was the grandest guy on earth.

But why should I try to tell you about him? If you've ever read any of the scientific journals, you've heard of Tom Warburton. If you're not the type who reads literature written largely in terms of x raised to the nth power, you've probably heard of World-Wide Business Machines, Inc., and the marvelous mechanical brain that goes into

their calculating machines. Tom Warburton developed that mechanical brain. Royalties from it, and from three or four other inventions, kept his bank account in six figures.

"Yes, I work for him."

This loose-jawed Joe hesitated. He looked me over again, making certain he had got the right guy.

"What's on your mind?"

There was something on his mind all right but the more he looked at me the less anxious he seemed to spill it. A couple of other Joes lined up at the back bar, and Ike Small, owner and bartender of Ike's Tavern, went back to serve them.

"How'd you like to make a grand for yourself?" Loose-jaw said suddenly.

"A—what?"

"A grand. A thousand iron men."

I didn't know what to say. It wasn't every day that strangers came up to me in taverns and asked me how I would like to have a thousands dollars.

Loose-jaw misinterpreted my silence.

"I'll made it two grand," he said. "But that's as high as I'm going," he hurriedly added. "You ain't gonna get any more than that out of me. The boss said—That's all you're gonna get. You can take it or leave it, just as you say."

"Two thou—What the hell for?"

For a second, Loose-jaw looked bewildered. "I thought I told you what it was for."

"You might have thought so, but you didn't do it."

"No?"

"No! What's this all about anyhow? What am I to do to earn this dough?"

He hesitated, looking me over again, the dull yellow flecks showing clearly in his eyes. He didn't exactly like me, he didn't quite trust me, and he was trying to make up his mind whether to run or plunge.

"Spit it out. Whatever you've got on your mind, say it."

He took a deep breath, and plunged. "I'll give you two grand—for Warburton's robot!"

Smack!

I SHOULD have waited, I should have drawn him out, I should have discovered who was behind him. I didn't stop to think. Tom was working on what he regarded as the most important invention he had ever made, a robot. Everything about it was strictly hush-hush. Nobody but his close friends was supposed to know anything about it. And here this little rat not only knew about it but was trying to bribe me to deliver it to him!

The hanging jaw snapped shut like a bear trap when my fist hit it. He went backward head-first, his hands and legs flailing like a man trying to swim on his back. He rammed into the wall with his head, sat down heavily. Now the loose jaw hung down farther than ever. Loose-jaw was out.

I started toward him, intending to pick him up and shake him back to life, then to shake out of him everything he knew. He knew a lot that suddenly I wanted to know.

"Duck, Herky!" Ike Small shouted, from behind the bar.

I started to turn. A beer bottle hit me a numbing blow on the left shoulder. It had been aimed at my head, but the guy had missed connections as I turned. Two men were coming toward me. I realized now that they were the same two men who had slid up to the back bar when Loose-jaw started to proposition me. Pals of his!

I swung on the one who had hit me with the beer bottle. My left arm wouldn't work. The beer bottle had paralyzed it. The Joe was bringing it up again. The second mug was digging

inside his coat for a gun.

My chin went down behind my left shoulder. My right crossed, carrying all my weight behind it. The beer bottle was up in the air coming down for the second stroke. The right passed under it. I got beer in my eyes. The mug with the bottle got a stroke of lightning on his jaw.

In the Marines, they used to tell me that when I hit a man he stayed hit. The man with the bottle couldn't use but one dose of that medicine. He went over backward. I turned, looking for the guy with the gun. He was the dangerous one. He had had time to draw that gun. I looked for him, expecting lead to fan my whiskers.

He was sitting on the floor, his legs spread out, his head up against the brass rail. Ike Small, a satisfied look on his face and the butt end of a pool cue in his hand, was settling back across the bar.

"Thanks, Ike," I said.

"It was little enough to do for a friend, Herky," he said, grinning. "But would you mind telling me what the hell started this fracas? One minute you were holding a sociable conversation, the next minute you had almost knocked a man through my back wall. What makes here, Herky?"

"That," I said, "is what I'm going to find out. Will you lend me your back room?"

Fortunately, we were the only patrons in the bar at the time so there was nobody to start yelling for the cops to come sticking their big noses into things. Ike not only loaned me his back room but he locked the front door of the joint and helped me drag the three Joes to the back. We revived them.

THEY wouldn't talk. They just sat there and glared at us and said nothing. They weren't putting out any dialogue.

"Shall we—" Ike hefted his pool cue.

It was a good idea but I had to turn it down. Hitting a man who can't or won't fight back is not my idea of fun. If they wouldn't talk, they just wouldn't talk. I searched them. Loose-jaw had a roll of bills on him big enough to choke a cow but he didn't have any letters or any identification of any kind.

I tossed the roll of lettuce in his face. "Take this and stuff it."

He glared at me but he also grabbed at the money. I headed for home. Tom would want to know about this, he would want to know plenty. The lab was in the country, well out of town. Pulling into the parking lot on two wheels, I darned near ran over Natalie Hunt and Ross Kimball as they came out of the side door of the lab. Natalie squealed and Ross glared. Then they recognized me and came hurrying over. Natalie was engaged to Tom.

She was giving a party that night and they wanted me to try to talk Tom into coming to it. Natalie was Society with a big S. There would be champagne and a swing band. Tom simply must come. Couldn't I make him come?

I guess I wasn't very polite, but they knew Tom Warburton as well as I did and they knew what he thought of parties. I had more important things on my mind than champagne and dance music. I dived into the lab.

"Tom! The damnedest thing just happened—"

On the table in front of him was enough scratch paper to have made one of the waste paper drives in World War II an instant success. He looked up and saw me and didn't see me. He knew I was there all right, his eyes were seeing me, but his mind was on some other problem. His hair was

tousled, a sure sign that he had been thinking hard.

"Yes, Herky, I agree that it's the damnedest thing that ever happened," he said slowly. "But how did you know?"

"How did I know? You goop, it happened to me!"

He looked at me again, with his eyes, and now I had a little of his mind. But not much of it. Just enough for him to be aware of my existence. "How could you know, Herky?" he said reasonably. "You weren't here when it happened? There is no way for you to know."

We were talking about different things! "Tom, damn it, listen to me." I told him about Loose-jaw. Staring at me, he listened. "Somebody is after your robot," I finished.

"It's not possible," he said.

"Maybe you think it isn't but I was offered two thousand dollars for him just the same."

"It violates the laws of the conservation of energy-mass," he said.

"W-what?" I gulped.

"Percy is eight pounds underweight," he explained.

He hadn't heard a word I had said. He had been looking at me and apparently listening but all the time he had been thinking about something else. Probably my jaw dropped when I realized what had happened. I just stood there and stared at him.

Jeanie Riggs saw my predicament. "He means Percy is losing weight," she explained. She was sitting at the table beside Tom, and she, at least had been listening. Jeanie was a technician, and if she wanted to use them she could have put a string of honorary degrees after her name a foot long. Brown-eyed, with wide, generous lips, she was Tom's assistant, and as nice a girl as I ever hope to meet.

"That's it!" Tom said emphatically. "That's the problem. Percy is eight pounds underweight, and I can't understand it."

Percy was the name Tom had given to his robot. All the time we were talking, Percy had been standing quietly in front of the table, a gleaming, metallic figure in the shape of a man.

"I've added up the weight of the individual parts that went into him three times," Tom muttered. "Each time they total 320 pounds. Therefore, he ought to weigh 320 pounds. But when I put him on the scales, he only weighs 312 pounds. What I want to know is what happened to the missing eight pounds!"

"So what? So he weighs eight pounds less than he should? So what?"

"What I want to know is *so why!*" Tom snapped. "When you put together 320 pounds of metal, you ought to get 320 pounds of weight. When you don't, I want to know why." He scowled at the robot. "What the hell is wrong with you?" he demanded.

"I—I don't know, Tom," Percy answered.

EVERY time I heard that husky metallic voice speak, I got a twinge up my backbone like a ghost had suddenly slipped up behind me and leaning over my shoulder, had gnashed its teeth in my ear. I knew the voice was coming from a loudspeaker hidden behind the chest plate, and I knew something of the mechanism that operated it. I knew Percy was made out of pieces of metal, aluminum, chromium steel, zinc, that he ran by electricity, but in spite of that I always got a chilly feeling around him. Tom had taken metal and the pressure of an electric force and out of them he had created something that was somehow—alive.

Not that I felt Percy was dangerous. It wasn't that. It was something quite

different, a feeling that he was alien, strange, not of this world. Somewhere inside him pulsed an alien life. He was more than metal and electric force, he was more than a machine—he was something new on earth, a different kind of life. The first time I saw him, I had the impression that Tom had built more than he knew about.

"Tom—" I began again.

"To hell with your thieves, Herky," he answered, irritation in his voice. "You take care of them. I've got another problem on my mind."

If anybody else had spoken to me like that, I would have socked him in the puss, but I had known Tom Warburton all my life, we had grown up together, raided apple orchards together, gone off to the wars together, each serving where he was best fitted. When he had come back from the wars, Tom had given me my old job back, as his assistant, his strong man to run off life insurance salesmen. I knew him too well to get mad at him. He was just busy, he didn't want to be bothered, and it was my job to see that he wasn't bothered.

"Okay," I said, and left.

Jeanie followed me out of the lab. "What is this, Herky, about somebody trying to bribe you?"

I told her the whole story. Her brown eyes did not leave my face as I spoke.

"I see," she said thoughtfully. "Herky, this is serious."

"I know it is."

"It's even more serious than you think."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this. When it happened, I didn't think it was important, but somebody has been prowling around the lab at night after we're gone."

"What?"

She nodded. "A stack of papers I left on my desk were gone through and left out of order. And, when I came in one morning, Percy said, 'Strange man here last night.' "

"Percy said that?"

"Yes. I couldn't get any more out of him. He either didn't know any more or he didn't have the words to tell what he knew, but he saw someone in the lab. Herky, it's up to us to take care of T—Mr. Warburton. What—what are we going to do, Herky?"

I knew what I was going to do. "Don't worry, Jeanie, I'll take care of it," I said.

Up in my room in the big house where we lived, I had a light carbine, one of those deadly little weapons that the army used so effectively in the last war. I had carried this gun with me across Sicily, up the toe of Italy, across the Adriatic, and up through the Balkans, as Hitler's empire went down before the impact of that horde of free-hipped, long-ranging, hard-driving men from across the seas. It was a good gun, one of the best. If I had chosen to put them there, there would have been a lot of notches on its stick.

I went to my room and got the gun. My fingers went around the barrel and stock as if they were meeting an old friend, a tried and true friend who was guaranteed to stand by in time of trouble. If the need arose, there could be some more notches on the stock of this gun.

II

THERE was no moon that night. The cool October wind was blowing down from the north. The great constellation of Orion was rising in the east. Seeing it, I remembered how often Tom and I, walking at night, had talked about the stars. He was a little nuts on the subject.

A thousand times he had said, "Some-

time, Herky, we're going to fly up there, we're going to find out what the stars really are, and maybe why they're up there in the sky. Maybe we're going to learn who put them there and what this universe is all about."

It was a big order, finding the answers to his questions. But Tom Warburton dreamed no little dreams.

"I don't mean that you and I will ever fly to the stars, Herky. We were probably born too early in human history for that. But someday somebody will make the trip, some man, some woman, will fly off into the big Out Yonder—the son of our son, the son of our great-grandson."

Star flight was Tom's secret dream. When he talked about it, a dreamy yearning crept into his voice. Once, in the street of a little broken town back behind Tunis, I talked to an old Arab squatting in front of what had been his home before the Jerries dive-bombed it. "Gone—Gone——" the old Arab had muttered. "They took the money I had saved, the money I would have used to make the trip to Mecca. I will never see Mecca now, I will never wear the green turban." Tears had rolled down the old man's cheeks as he spoke. There was the same tone in that old Arab's voice that appeared in Tom's voice when he talked of flying to the stars. The Arab had wanted to see Mecca, his holy city, before he died. Tom Warburton wanted to fly to the stars. Two dreamers with dreams too big for them—

CARBINE tucked under my arm, I made the rounds that night. Burning lights in the big laboratory revealed that Tom and Jeanie were still working. The lights might burn all night. When Tom was lost in his work, he forgot all about time; Jeanie would stay as long as he stayed.

I often wondered if he ever noticed how long Jeanie stayed. Or saw the lights in her eyes when she looked at him. I guess he didn't notice. He was engaged to Natalie and she was quite capable of making sure that he noticed only her.

Behind the big, barn-like lab was a thick clump of trees with a path running through it, a likely spot for prowlers to be hiding. I walked down the path.

Clunk!

I sensed rather than saw the blackjack coming, tried to dodge, and failed. It thudded against my skull. Red lights exploded in front of my eyes. As I fell, the night got blacker than black.

Consciousness returned slowly. There was a screaming fury of pain somewhere in the back of my head. A giant triphammer was beating on my skull, threatening at any moment to crush the bone. Suddenly I remembered I had been slugged. And abruptly sat up.

Tried to sit up. I couldn't move.

I was tied to a tree, tied and gagged.

"Damn!"

A choked gurgle was the only sound. I should not have let this happen. I should have been more alert.

A second later I realized how much had depended on my alertness.

There was a light in the sky, a big light. The whole night was bright with a strange radiance. The dark bulk of the trees stood out clearly, the stars had dimmed as they do when dawn approaches.

I saw the source of the light.

It was coming from the lab. The whole big workshop was on fire. Long tongues of flame were reaching toward the sky. Burning wood was crackling. A great pillar of smoke was geysering upward from the blaze.

Where was Tom? Where was Jeanie?

I don't know how I broke the rope

that had been used to tie me to the tree but I broke it, and headed for the lab as fast as my still shaky legs would carry me.

"Tom! Jeanie!"

There was no answer.

Heat poured in searing waves from the building. Flames leaped skyhigh. The damned wooden fire-trap was belching smoke like a volcano. I ran around it. And saw Tom.

He was lying in the drive, a tangle of arms and legs, a tangle that hugged the ground. I had seen too many men lie like that after the red tide of battle had receded to doubt that he was dead. When they sagged into the ground like that, the stretcher bearers didn't even stop to look at them.

I bent over him.

It wasn't Tom! The man was dead, deader than Hitler, but he wasn't Tom Warburton. It was Loose-jaw. It was the little rat who had tried to bribe me.

He and his pals had come here to the lab. They had slugged me. Then they had raided the lab, probably looking for Percy, and had set the building on fire to cover their theft.

Where were Tom and Jeanie?

I ran around the burning building, searching for them. The roof was threatening to fall in at any moment. Burning rafters stood out against the sky like the white-hot ribs of some gaunt skeleton. Were they in there?

I TRIED to go in. Furnace heat drove me back. Covering my face with my coat, I tried it again. Flesh began to blister on my arms. I had to back up.

"Tom!"

There was no answer. Far-off, I could hear the clang of a bell, the hoot of a siren, as the city fire trucks hurried toward the blaze. The firemen were coming—too late. Even if they had arrived in time, they couldn't have done much. We were outside the city limits and they would have had no water to pump.

"Tom—Jeanie—" My voice was a hoarse gap.

The crackling roar of flames was the only answer.

Then—I saw something. My heart almost stopped beating. Through an open door I had glimpsed something moving inside the building. Daniel in the furnace of fire! I saw the movement again.

Percy!

The robot hadn't been stolen. Loose-jaw had failed in his mission. Percy was coming out of the building. In his steel arms he was carrying Tom and Jeanie. He came out, saw me, stopped.

"No go with you," he said. "No go — " Then he recognized me. "Herky!"

He came trotting toward me. "Three strange men tie up Tom, Jeanie," the metallic voice whispered. "Set building on fire. Take me out with them. Leave Tom, Jeanie there—I no go with them, Herky. I go back, help Tom, Jeanie—"

Loose-jaw and his pals had set the building on fire, leaving Tom and Jeanie inside. Then they had tried to take Percy with them. Percy hadn't gone. Percy had resisted. Knowing the strength in those steel arms, I no longer wondered why Loose-jaw was such a ground-hugging hulk when I found him. Percy had worked on him!

Tenderly the robot extended the two bodies toward me. "You help, Herky," he husked. "Percy don't know what to do. You help Tom, Jeanie—"

They were still alive. Horribly burned, but still living. We put them in the back seat of my car. Percy rode back there, holding them in his arms like a child with two burned but greatly-treasured dolls that he was carrying to

the doctor. I mashed the accelerator to the floorboard.

At the hospital, the doctor shoved me and Percy outside. I give that Doc credit. He took Percy in his stride, acting as if every other night or so a robot came walking in with two emergency cases under his arms. What he thought when he saw Percy, I don't know. He probably forgot all about Percy after he got one look at Tom and Jeanie. After he got a glimpse of them he knew how hard a fight he had on his hands to keep them alive. Percy and I went outside and walked up and down, watching the lights in the operating room. A car came into the driveway on two wheels.

Natalie and Ross jumped out of it.

They looked startled when they saw us.

"What's that robot doing—"

"Herky," Natalie interrupted. "I—we—just heard. How—how is he?"

"If you know any prayers, you'd better say 'em."

Her face whitened. She glanced at Ross, then hurried into the hospital. Kimball lingered.

"What happened, Herky? Did—I mean, what happened?"

I told him what I knew.

"Someone tried to steal Percy! That's impossible! No—no one knows that he exists. You must be mistaken."

"Ask Percy!" I said. If he didn't want to believe me, he could ask the robot. He didn't ask Percy. Instead, he hurried into the hospital.

PERCY and I walked up and down some more. He kept pace with me, turning when I turned, shortening his ponderous stride to mine. Over and over again he whispered a single word "Tomjeanie— Tomjeanie—"

Poor devil! He was made of aluminum and steel and he ran by an electric current, there was supposed to be no emotion in him, no feeling, but "Tomjeanie" was all he could say. What went on in the strange mechanical depths of his mind? Was he worrying about the man who had created him, the woman who had helped? Man and woman—To him, they were gods, creators, the first principles of his universe, the prime movers of his existence.

I slapped him on a metal shoulder. "Don't worry, Percy. They will be all right. The doctor w i l l c u r e them. They're just hurt. You get hurt sometimes, Percy, when a cog slips out of place. That is what happened to them. The doctor will take them apart, just like Tom takes you apart when anything goes wrong, and fix them up as good as new. They'll be all right—I hope to God!"

The photoelectric cells that were his eyes studied me intently. Somewhere in his dark brain wheels were turning, shadowy thoughts moving, as he tried to fit together the jigsaw puzzle of human actions, tried to understand the truth about the strange creatures who had created him.

The lights dimmed in the operating room.

"No, you can't see them," the tired doctor said. "No one can see them. Yes, they've got a chance. If an infection doesn't set in—"

That was all he said. That was all he knew. Nobody but God knew any more, the God of the far hills, of the bright stars, of the big Out Yonder.

III

"HOW—how is Jeanie?"

That was the first question Tom asked when I finally got in to see him. I told him she was all right, that she was doing fine, that she would be up and around in a few more days, if

everything went right. I did not tell him how many chances there were that something would go wrong, fatally wrong, some infection develop, some germ slip in through the terrible burns. Even pencillin, the sulfa drugs, could not control all possible infections.

His first question was about Jeanie, his second about Percy.

"That big chunk of tin is right on the beam," I answered. "Incidentally, he saved your neck, in case you don't know."

"I know." He sounded relieved, pleased. "I've got something I want you to do."

"I'm here to do it, pal."

"Weigh Percy every day."

"Huh?" I wondered if he was out of his head. Weigh the robot? That didn't make sense.

Make sense or not, he insisted I do it. "Go weigh him right now and come back and tell me the result."

"Sure, Tom."

The scales said Percy weighed 308 pounds.

"Four more pounds gone," Tom whispered. "I wonder—" His voice faded into silence, faded into the depths of the mass of cotton that was padded around him. I waited. Soft, muffled hospital sounds came from the hallway outside the room, the whisper of soft soled shoes on the floor, the muted rattle of bed pans in the distance, the hushed voices of visitors. Then Tom spoke again.

"Was the lab destroyed, Herky?"

"Completely, Tom."

A lot of money had gone up in that blaze. The building hadn't been so expensive but the equipment in it had cost two or three fortunes. A first class machine shop, a chemical lab, an electrical shop with everything in it from heavy motors to the finest vacuum tubes. An ordinary person would have wailed to high heaven if he had suffered that loss. Tom didn't wail. He spoke two words.

"Rebuild it!"

"What?"

"Put up a new building and re-equip it completely."

"But that will cost a fortune!"

"I don't give a damn what it costs. If I am going to find out why Percy is losing weight, I'll need a building to work in and equipment to work with. Get moving, Herky, and don't spare the horses."

He was spending a hundred thousand dollars to find out why Percy was losing weight!

I might have argued the question with him, not that argument would have influenced the stubborn mule, but the doctor came in and bounced me out.

Rebuild the lab! Re-equip it! All right.

I DIDN'T spare the horses. Carpenters, ditch diggers, concrete mixing crews, laborers, I hired them by droves. A steady stream of trucks delivered cement, gravel, reinforcing steel for the foundations, lumber, great piles of it, composition shingles for the roof, everything that goes into the construction of a building. Carpenters who had never moved faster than a snail on any job got the lead out of their pants. They weren't working for the army now, building camps at their leisure. They were working for a man who was in a hurry, for me.

In spite of the rush I found time every day to weigh Percy. Each time he got on the scales, the darned robot weighed less than he had the day before.

If a human being lost weight regularly, it was a case for a doctor. Such things happened frequently, to men. But a robot, made entirely out of metal, simply could not lose weight.

It was impossible.

Impossible or not, it was happening. Because it was happening, Tom Warburton was going slowly nuts. To me, the loss of weight was puzzling but not very important. Tom seemed to think it was very important. He worried about it all the time he was in the hospital. When he was able to come home, he was still fretting about it.

Natalie brought him home in her car. She had visited him every day in the hospital, brought him books, flowers, candy until the doctor threatened to throw her out. Bringing Tom home, she was as fussy as an old hen with one chicken. She didn't bring Jeanie. I did that.

"Tell me, Herky, do I look terrible?" was Jeanie's first question after I had helped her into the car.

"You look swell to me," I said stoutly.

She sighed and patted me on the leg. She knew I was lying and so did I, but what could I do? Could I tell her that the burns had left her face looking like raw hamburger, that she, and Tom, looked like creatures out of a nightmare? But she knew. The knowledge was in her eyes, killing something deep down inside her, killing her soul. I think she wished she had died in that fire, rather than live like this, wished she had died because—because she was in love with Tom.

Yes, he was engaged to Natalie but Jeanie loved him, and as long as he wasn't married, she could hope that someday, somehow, maybe he would notice her, maybe— Now, if he noticed her.

We drove home in silence.

The next day both Tom and Jeanie were back in the new lab, at work. The doctor had issued strict orders that they were to rest but Tom didn't give two hoots in Georgia for anything any doctor ever said. Whether he was strong enough or not, he was going. Jeanie went with him. They had a new lab to work in, new equipment, and the same old problem—why was Percy losing weight?

It was a problem they could not solve. Because they could not solve it, they called for help. Help came. The best scientists in the United States, the biggest names in physics, three famous mathematicians, two expert chemists, metallurgists. Big shots, every one of them.

WHEN they first saw Percy, those scientists almost went nuts. A thinking, moving, talking robot! Here was something that stirred their souls, not only because of their interest in the robot mechanism itself, but because of the tremendous changes such an invention would bring about in human society. There would be robots to mine coal, robots to dig ditches, to run trains, to dam rivers, to work at machines, robots to perform all the drudging tasks humans have always so fervently hated. Tom had dreamed of all these things when he started work on Percy. The scientists instantly saw the value of the robot, not only in terms of dollars—the man who could control this invention would have more millions at his command than he could count—but in terms of social change, of human progress. Their first thought was that Tom had called them here just to look at the invention. They looked, and goggled in awe. Then he told them what he really wanted.

They got silent.

"It is impossible," one spoke, at last. "It cannot be true."

"He is made of metal, I take it. According to the laws of nature as we know them, metal cannot lose weight, except, of course, through oxidation."

Tom grinned. "There are the scales.

Weigh him. Then take him apart and weigh each piece separately. See what answer you get."

The answer they got was that the parts weighed more than the whole.

Then they really went nuts.

"The confounded scales are wrong!"

"The whole can't weigh less than the sum of the parts that compose it."

"Check those scales!"

They checked the scales and the scales were right! Discovering what was happening to Percy was their job. I had another problem to solve. It was even more important than their problem. The prowlers had come back.

The gang that had tried to steal Percy and had failed were trying again. Every night secret, furtive shadows were around the lab, shadows that slipped away before I could catch them. Every morning I found tracks in the dust, places under the shrubbery where watchers had been hiding. It was my job to catch them, or scare them off. I failed on the job.

The scientists failed on their job, too. They spent ten days trying to find out why Percy lost weight. They didn't quit the job in disgust—they weren't that type. A situation beyond their control forced them to quit. They lost their boss, both of their bosses. Tom and Jeanie went back to the hospital. They were in the hospital a week. When they came out, Tom looked grim.

"Bad news, Herky," he said.

"Bad news?"

"Yes. A—a blood infection."

The burned face twisted into a wry grin. "Six months to live, the doctor said."

"Six! Tom, what the hell are you saying? You don't mean it!"

"I do mean it," he said slowly. "My number hasn't been called yet but it's on the board. The infection is in the blood and any drug strong enough to kill it will also kill me. There is nothing that can be done, the doc says."

He looked at me, looked away, and his gaze went into the far distances as though he was searching for something that lay beyond the horizon, some faraway goal, some happy land that he knew existed but could not reach. "Effendi, I shall never wear the green turban, not ever."

Abruptly his gaze came back, focused on the girl standing beside him, on Jeannie. He put his arm around her.

"Sorry," he said.

She clung to him. "It wasn't your fault," she whispered. "You couldn't help it. And—I'm ready."

"Jeanie too?" I gasped.

"Yes," they whispered together.

SIX months to live!

I would have bought a case of whiskey and drunk myself blind. I would have cut a wide swath among the bright lights. I would have gone to the loudest night clubs, where the bands were the hottest, I would have made passes at hat check girls, at waitresses, at cuties on the street. I would have drunk myself blind.

Tom and Jeanie didn't do any of these things. They went back to the lab, locked themselves in, went to work. Natalie came. Tom saw her briefly. When she left, her face was white and tense. Tom and Jeanie worked.

Death was coming closer to them every day, every hour. He was so close they could feel him breathing down their necks. They ignored him. They worked. I slipped into the lab often, watched them quietly. Percy was helping them. Tom looked up from the mass of papers on his desk.

"I've got it!" he shouted.

Archimedes, shouting "Eureka!" Bell, hearing the first faint flutter over

his telephone, Marconi, when his first wireless signal came through, were not half as excited as he was. Even Percy seemed to have caught the tension.

Whatever they had been working on, he seemed to have found the answer.

"Got what?" I demanded.

"The reason why Percy is losing weight!"

Six months to live, and he was as excited as a school boy because he had made a scientific discovery. He had solved his problem, and he was tremendously pleased about it.

"Good, Tom! I'm so glad. What is this?" Jeanie questioned.

He was starting to tell her when I got up and walked out. I can stand so much and no more. If it made him feel better to stay in that darned lab and work, it was all right with me, but I was sick inside, sicker than I have ever been, sick because I wanted to help, because I would have given anything I possessed to help them, and couldn't. There wasn't anything that I, or anyone else, could do. I had talked to the doctor. He had said there was no hope. This wasn't just his opinion either. He had called in big-shot specialists to back up his diagnosis. I had talked to the specialists. They had listened, and shook their heads.

I walked for miles that night, just walked. I stumbled into a pig pen and fell into a ditch and tripped myself over a strand of barbed wire and didn't give a damn. I was up all night. Tom and Jeanie must have stayed up all night too. The lights were still burning in the lab when I returned.

The next afternoon the trucks began to arrive. They came on special orders that Tom had apparently telephoned from the lab the night before. They were filled with electrical equipment, each shipment tagged in big red letters, filled with electrical equipment, each shipment tagged in big red letters, "RUSH!"

They came from Westinghouse, from General Electric, from General Motors. Some of the stuff had come most of the way by special air express, had been landed at the airport, rushed here by truck. The prices on the bills of lading ran into thousands of dollars.

Electrical equipment, the best in the country, price no object.

I WENT into the lab to see Tom.

"What makes here, my lad?"

"You mean why am I ordering all this stuff?"

"Yes."

"Ah—"

"Ah, hell! What's going on here?"

Amid the litter of paper on the desk in front of him was a half-empty bottle of caffein tablets. Jeanie was sitting beside him and Percy was leaning over his shoulder. He tapped the desk with his pencil, stared at me. The far-away look was in his eyes.

"If a man die, shall he live again?" he said softly.

Tom Warburton, as tough-minded a skeptic as ever lived, was quoting the Bible!

"If a man die—"

He nodded. "We shall surely die, Herky."

"What the hell are you trying to say?" I exploded. "Don't give me any double talk. Have you gone nuts?"

I watched his eyes, searching for the evasive glance that would tell he had cracked. He faced my gaze without faltering. There were doubtful lights in his eyes, and the trace of a puzzled bewilderment, a vague hurt combined with a vast yearning, but there was nothing to indicate insanity. I looked at Jeanie. In her eyes was burning, blinding hope. She looked—too happy to breathe.

I was thunderstruck. This man and this woman were marked for death. A day before they had seemed baffled, bewildered, helpless. Now they looked like two kids who had accidentally found the keys to paradise but weren't quite sure they could use them. Even Percy seemed elated as if he, somehow, had a contribution to make. And had made it.

"Tom!" I was breathless at the thought. "Have you discovered some way to—to cure—"

"No, Herky." For an instant there was sadness in his eyes. "Not that. It's—"

"What?"

He was shaking his head. "I don't want to tell even you, Herky, for the very good reason that you will promptly call the lunatic asylum. And you'll help them break down the door when they come, because you will think you are saving my life."

"Tom!"

He knew me better than that. He was instantly sorry for what he had said. He squirmed a little. "I—I can't tell you, Herky. We may fail. The odds are we will fail—"

I knew what was coming then and also that nothing could be done about it. Tom was not the type of inventor who boasted in advance of what he was going to do. If he talked at all, it was after he had succeeded. Or had failed.

"Sorry, Herky. I just—well you know how it is. Things may not work out like we hope they will."

I knew how it was. With that knowledge, I had to be content. His eyes dropped back to the designs on the desk in front of him. One hand went automatically for a caffein tablet. Percy leaned forward, balancing himself on his ponderous feet, his photoelectric eyes scanning the sketches.

"This way, Tom," he husked. "Draw line here. This right place for line."

Tom nodded agreement. His pencil traced a line across the sheet.

THE next day electrical equipment was still arriving, all of it marked "RUSH!" The prices of some of that stuff made me scream in anguish but Tom paid. For the special radio tubes —I call them radio tubes because they were electronic generators not because they looked as if they belonged in any radio set ever built—he paid thousands of dollars. For the ball, he spent even more.

The ball was about five feet in diameter. It was a shell of steel with walls six inches thick. Quite obviously it had been made to special order, of the best grade, triple tested, guaranteed forever grade of beryl steel. It must have weighed a ton. We backed the truck that brought it into the lab, rolled it into a special cradle that had been built to hold it.

"Now we can really get to work," Tom said. He turned to me. "Under no circumstances am I to be disturbed, by *anybody*. Admit no one to this lab. Have our meals served here."

"Okay, Tom."

"And here. Get us a dozen bottles of these." He was holding the empty caffein tablet bottle toward me.

I didn't see him or Jeanie again for two weeks. They wouldn't even admit me to the lab. And when I did see them again—

THIN clouds were over the face of the moon that night. A wind, edged with chill, was blowing straight from the direction of the north pole, sending dead leaves scurrying across the barren ground. It was a November night, such a night as is fit for goblins, for ghosts, for frightened farm boys

to see witches flying across the face of the moon.

The ghosts were out.

Somebody, down in the patch of woods below the lab, was using a flashlight and being very cautious about it.

Either there was a new prowler around or one of the old ones was getting very careless.

I stalked him. He was poking around at the foot of a big oak tree, digging a hole in the ground.

I could have put a bullet close to him and watched him run but I didn't want to do that. I wanted to catch him. He had a shovel. He was digging like he was looking for buried treasure and expected every minute to find it.

"Hands up, you!"

I was within five feet of him. He almost jumped out of his skin. His hands flew straight up.

"What are you doing here?"

"Why—I—" he stammered. "I was just doing a little digging. I didn't mean any harm. Just doing a little digging, that's all."

"What were you digging for?"

The answer to that question came from a source I had not expected, came in a form I had not anticipated. It came as a gun muzzle jabbing into my back, as a voice rasping in my ear.

"Drop that gun!"

The voice was speaking from right behind me. It was my turn to jump. Instead of jumping I dropped my gun. A hand reached around in front of me and snatched it up. The same hand patted my pockets to see if there was a pistol hidden on me. There wasn't.

"All right, boys," the voice spoke again. "We've got the watchdog. Now we can get on about our business.

Eight men rose out of the bushes. The Joe who had been digging the hole dropped his hands and laughed.

"How does it feel to be a sucker?" he chortled. "Ha! The great Hercules, the hot-shot bodyguard walking into a trap like a cornered yokel."

I had walked straight into a trap. The cautiously-displayed flashlight, the Joe digging the hole, had been designed to attract my attention. I had walked right straight into it.

"If you're thinking of doing anything about it, Hercules," the voice grated in my ear. "Now is the time to try it."

I had been thinking of trying something all right but the tone of that thug's voice changed my mind. I stood very still.

"You, Willie, guard him."

Willie, it turned out, was the Joe who had been digging the hole. He was left to guard me. The others headed for the lab.

"What makes here, Willie?"

"Shut up!"

"I only asked a civil question."

"This ain't no time for you to be askin' no questions."

"But—"

Clunk! He clipped me on the side of the head with his gun, knocked me backward.

"You—"

"Was you going to say something, Herky?"

The gun covered my wishbone. There was a sickly, but eager, grin on his face. I eased myself back to the ground, sat very still. Willie watched me. He was hoping I would move, so he could shoot me. This man was a sadist, a killer.

A CRASH sounded from the direction of the lab. Willie looked toward the sound. I came up from the ground, fast. The gun exploded as it was knocked aside. My fist went home against Willie's jaw. Ten seconds later I had the gun in my hand and was

heading toward the lab. Willie was asleep.

Before I got to the lab, I saw another ghost. It passed around the lab, drifted off across the fields, a vaguely defined ball. A ghost! Every hair on my head lifted straight up. Skin crawled all over my back. A ghost!

Had I seen it, or hadn't I? It disappeared before I was sure I had seen anything. I ran on toward the lab.

Crash! The sound came from inside the lab. I stopped, listened. If something heavy had been thrown against the wall, it would have made a sound like that. The crash was followed almost instantly by the sharp crack of a pistol.

Tom didn't own a pistol. He wasn't using that gun. The shot could only have come from one of the thugs.

Crack! The pistol exploded again.

I dived into the lab.

There was a big hole in one side of the building but I had no time to wonder what had caused the hole. My attention was held by the group at the far side of the lab. A fight! Men swirled in a confused knot around a central figure. Someone was down and the thugs were closing in on him. Tom down? I saw who it was. Percy!

Against the wall was a battered hulk of flesh. Apparently Percy had picked up one of the thieves, thrown him. The others had closed in. The shots I had heard had been aimed at the robot. A slug had penetrated his body, going through the voice opening or through a joint, damaging something inside. The robot, like a gladiator who can fight no longer, was down. They had whipped him.

"Hands up, you dirty rats!"

They hadn't whipped me. I was still in there.

Heads jerked around at my command. They saw me. The thin-lipped, black-headed mug who was their leader looked in my direction. He must have recognized me but no sign of recognition appeared in his eyes. He dropped his gun, slowly raised his hands above his head.

"If you move a muscle—"

He didn't move. Nor did the others. They looked at me, and didn't see me. Men dazed from shell-shock, drug addicts, zombies, would look like these men.

They should have been startled when I appeared. They should have been surprised. They were neither startled nor surprised. I was not important to them. Nor was my gun important. With a startled shock, I realized that something was wrong.

"What the hell is wrong here?"

The thin-lipped leader swallowed, tried to answer, failed. Beads of sweat had popped out all over his face, showed clearly under the daylight lamps in the lab. His skin had turned yellow. He managed to nod toward the far end of the lab. I looked in the direction he had nodded. And saw what was wrong. My mind went blank. My mind fled into the dark corners of my brain, whimpering that my eyes were lying to it.

Tom Warburton was lying on the floor.

He had no head. The face was gone, the whole skull had been laid open. The floor was covered with blood.

Jeanie was lying on a table. The same thing that had been done to Tom had been done to her. Sitting on the table beside her was a set of surgical instruments, scalpels, trepanning saws, all bloody. There was an electric sterilization box on the table, with steam rising from it. An ether cone had been dropped on the floor.

This was what the thugs had seen. Just before I had entered, they had seen

this. No wonder they had paid no attention to me!

"I thought I heard shots—" a dazed voice gulped.

Turning, I saw Ross Kimball. Natalie was with him. They saw me but they had not yet seen the thing on the floor, on the table.

"We heard shots, Herky," Natalie said. "We were coming to see Tom and we thought we heard shots—" She started forward.

"Go back, Natalie." I stepped in front of her.

"Go back?"

"To the car, outside, anywhere."

From the tone of my voice, she must have known that something was wrong. "Is—is Tom hurt?"

"No—" Tom wasn't hurt, not any more. He would never be hurt again, not ever. Nothing could hurt him now.

She pushed past me, gasped a shrill little cry of pain and fear. I caught her as she fainted, eased her gently to the floor.

"What happened?" This was Kimball speaking. There was a rasp in his voice. He had seen it, too, and he wasn't talking very clearly.

"I—" I didn't know what had happened. I hadn't had time to think about that yet.

"When we came in, they were like that," Thin-lips spoke. "We didn't do anything. I swear it. We found them just like this. You can't hang this on us—"

The hard line of his lips had faded into an apprehensive twitch.

"Then who did do it?" Kimball husked.

"I—I don't know. *He* was standing by the table. *He* still had a knife in his hand."

Thin-lips was pointing at the prostrate robot, at Percy.

The robot had done this! I could guess why. Percy, knowing that something was wrong with them, had been trying to help them, to repair them, to put them back into working order. When anything went wrong with him, Tom had taken him apart and repaired the damage. Not realizing the difference between a machine and a living body, Percy had tried to repair them!

"Let's get out of here," Thin-lips whispered.

"Stay where you are," Kimball ordered.

"But now we don't want—"

"Shut up!"

The thug was silent. The whole lab was silent. In that silence I heard a voice whispering.

"Herky—"

Percy, prostrate on the floor, was calling my name.

"No kill Tom," the whisper came again. "Help Tomjeanie. No hurt them. Fix them—good—"

I did not doubt his motives. He had been trying to help his creator. In his strange alien mind had probably been no thought except to help. But the result—the result was there on the floor in a pool of blood, on the table, in red death.

"Tom—Tom die—" Percy whispered.

"I get it!" Ross Kimball said. "I see it now. At first, I thought this stopped everything. No one would want a dangerous robot, a killer, even if he was trying to help—Drop that gun, Herky!"

Kimball's eyes blazed at me. A pistol in his hand covered me.

"Drop that gun!" he repeated.

He would shoot, if I didn't obey him. I let the gun slide to the floor.

"All he needs is a few minor changes in his electrical hookup to make him worth the millions we always thought he was worth!" Kimball shouted.

There was elation in his voice, wild elation. "Millions!" he mouthed. "Millions!"

He sounded like a man who has been seeking a fortune and has found it.

"You—" I whispered. "You—"

Lights glittered in his eyes. "So you've finally discovered who has been trying to get possession of Percy? You've stumbled on to the truth at last?"

I DIDN'T say anything. This false friend, this rat, this dirty crook, had been back of the prowlers all the time. If I could have gotten my hands on him, I would have beaten him to death. Probably he had hired Natalie —

But Natalie had recovered from her faint.

"Don't talk so much!" she snapped. "Have the men carry that robot out of here. Don't stand there gloating. Move!"

This was Natalie talking, Natalie, who had always acted like a clinging vine, like a frail, fragile little girl who must be protected, cared for. I never heard a top sergeant with a harsher voice than she had at this moment.

When she spoke, Kimball jumped. "You, Harkness, get your men into action. Pick up that robot and carry him out of here. Get moving!"

He was talking to Thin-lips. "Get the lead out of your pants and show me some action!" Thin-lips shouted at his men.

I brought my arms down. The flat of my hand hit Kimball's wrist. The gun jumped out of his hand. I grabbed for it, trying to catch it before it hit the floor.

The damned thing slipped through my fingers. I dived after it. Kimball kicked me in the head.

I grabbed his feet, yanked. His tail hit the floor with a thud that shook the building. As he tried to sit up, I hit him in the jaw. I grabbed again for the gun.

That gun was desperately important. If I could get it, I had a chance. I touched it. Silk-clad legs flashed before my eyes, a screeching cat seemed to land on my head. The gun slid across the floor. I had an armful of Natalie.

I don't know where she learned her fighting but she knew all the things to do. She scratched, clawed, screamed. Never in my life have I hit a woman. I didn't hit her. I got to my knees, lifted her up, dropped her flat on her girdled bottom. When she hit, she was a surprised girl.

I didn't have time to enjoy her surprise. What seemed to be a herd of elephants landed on me. Thin-lips and his crew of pirates! I managed to rise to my knees, fists lashing out, pummeling against bodies. For every blow I gave, I took three in return. My head was knocked in every direction at once. There were too many of them. Like wolves around a wounded bear, they were closing in for the kill. I was going down.

"Coming—Herky—help—" a mechanical voice whispered.

Percy was coming to my rescue. Somehow the robot had managed to find the strength to stand erect or maybe he had been playing 'possum all the time. He lurched to his feet now, dived into the fight.

When he hit, something gave. The steel fist punched. One of the thugs dropped silently.

"Give 'em hell, Percy!"

"Give—hell—Herky!" he croaked in answer.

Crack!

A pistol roared. The bullet whanged into the robot. Abruptly Percy was

sitting on the floor, staring from dulling eyes at nothing. At the same time a gun barrel crashed down against my head. I fell heavily.

"Shoot him!" Natalie screamed.

KIMBALL was holding the gun. He was pointing it at me, but he didn't have much of a stomach for murder.

"We can't leave a witness behind us!" Natalie yelled. "We won't ever be safe as long as he is alive. Shoot him!"

Sweet girl! What a pleasant little murderess she was. She, not Kimball, was really the brains of this gang. She was exactly right about me. No matter where they hid, I'd hunt them down, if they let me live.

Kimball realized she was right. I saw him steel himself to pull the trigger of the gun.

I was really too dazed, too hurt, too sick, to care what happened. Also I had the impression that the gun, Kimball, Natalie, were all parts of some bad dream that presently would pass away. It was a bad dream, a nightmare, and the quicker it was over, the better.

I was sure it was a dream because I was seeing something that could only happen in a dream.

The ghost had returned.

The ghost that I had seen drift across the fields and slip out of sight was coming into the lab, coming through the jagged hole in the side wall. It moved through the air with a sureness that was full of purpose. There was a new sound in the room, a thin, sustained note like the whine of a high-speed motor generator.

Kimball—Natalie heard it. Both turned. They saw the ball. Color went out of Kimball's face like red ink marks vanishing when the eradicator is applied.

"What—what is that?"

He was talking to himself, to Natalie, maybe to me. Maybe he was expecting us to answer him. He was certainly not expecting the answer he got.

"Hello, Ross," a cool voice said.

I almost jumped out of my skin. I knew that voice.

Silence.

"Hello, Natalie," the voice came again.

Neither Natalie nor Kimball moved. The ball hovered in the air, a five-foot sphere of steel that I recognized at last.

"Herky!" There was shock in the voice now. "Are you hurt?"

The ball moved toward me.

The movement jarred Kimball into action. As fast as he could pull it, he jerked the trigger of the pistol. Bullets poured from the gun in a steady stream, blasted against the ball, blasted and bounced off. The gun clicked, empty.

The ball hung in the air unharmed.

"This is good steel, Ross," the voice said. "The best steel ever poured on earth. Bullets don't make much of an impression on it."

Kimball dropped the gun. A second later he had drawn another pistol from his coat pocket and was pointing it not at the ball but at me.

"Stay away," he ordered. "Stay away or I'll shoot him."

Kimball was fast mentally. Impossible as it was, he had already realized something had happened and was taking the only possible step to control the situation.

A shot came from the ball. Before Kimball could pull the trigger of his gun, his head had splashed into bloody bits that splattered all over the room.

For one terrible second, his headless body stood defiantly on its feet. Then, like a piece of beef falling from a hook it thudded to the floor.

NATALIE began to run. She screamed as she ran, screamed as if madness had overtaken her. She screamed as she ran from the lab, still screaming as she ran up the hill toward the road. Thin-lips and his gang followed her, running furtively, like rats.

Percy crawled toward the ball.

"Tom—" he whispered. "Tomjeanie—"

"We're all right, Percy," the voice from the ball answered. "We lost control at first and this thing almost ran away with us, but we're all right now, thanks to you and your help."

Tom Warburton was speaking from that ball.

"Herky, are you all right? Are you badly hurt?"

This was Jeanie speaking now. Her voice was coming from the ball, too.

"I'm all right," I whispered. "Physically, I'll get all right. But—my nerves —Where—"

My eyes went to the bodies, one on the floor, the other on the table. Tom and Jeanie were lying as I had first seen them, bloody bodies, bodies that had certainly died. But their voices were coming from the ball.

"Yes, our bodies are there," Tom's voice hurriedly said. "But our brains are here, in this ball, in nutrient baths."

"Huh?"

He spoke with forced calmness, as if he knew that if he were not calm I would go insane. "Percy helped us. In fact, I'm not sure it was not his idea in the first place. You see, we were going to die. But we didn't want to die. We wanted to cheat death, if we could. We did cheat him. Our bodies are dead, but our brains—all of us that really matters—are here in this ball. Percy performed the operation, transplanted the brains, made the connections from nerve tissue to the controls of the sphere—"

Brains in a huge steel ball that floated in the air. *Floated?* How could it float there, as if it had no weight?

"That was the big secret," Tom's voice answered. "Remember Percy was losing weight? Well, that was the clue. He was losing weight because I had accidentally built into him a system of producing artificial antigravity. I admit it was an accident but many another important discovery has been made by accident. That is why the ball floats, because antigravity apparatus has been built into it. It has no weight. In fact, if we want to, we can —"

Antigravity, brains of my two best friends in a steel ball, friends who had cheated death, who would not die now, maybe not ever.

I fainted.

The end? The end came two nights ago. Percy and I watched it. The ball had remained in the lab for weeks while Percy worked on the mechanisms inside it, perfecting them, making them run smoothly, surely. Then, because there was antigravity in the ball—

Percy and I watched. The ball rose up, up, up, into the night time sky. Tom's voice came back.

"Goodbye Percy, goodbye, Herky."

"Goodbye," Jeanie's voice came.

The ball went up. They had always wanted to see the stars, these two. Now they were going there, going in a way that no human had ever thought of going, but going just the same. The antigravity in the ball would take them there, take them to the farthest star the clearest night reveals.

"Happy landings, Tom and Jeanie," I shouted.

"Happy landings, Tomjeanie!" Percy echoed.

The ball went out of sight into the clear sky of night.

ILLUSTRATED BY
A. K. BILDER AND
Pfc. JULIAN S. KRUPA

Seated on the ocean floor were strange creatures . . .

OVERLORD of VENUS

By Lt. William Lawrence Hamling

"THE damn business is getting out of my hands," Carley Sloane, Field Director of Terra Mining Projects on Venus, said to Jim Rice, ex-Captain of the Interplanetary Rangers. "Every time one of our scientists starts a project in the lowlands of the Venusian Sea we end up one scientist less."

Jim Rice gazed thoughtfully at the pudgy little man. "Who was it this time?" he asked.

Carley Sloane's face became a sober mask. "John Brendel."

Jim Rice looked aghast. "John Brendel! But he had Marion here at Venus City with him! I talked to them both just last week before I convoyed your ore shipment to Earth—"

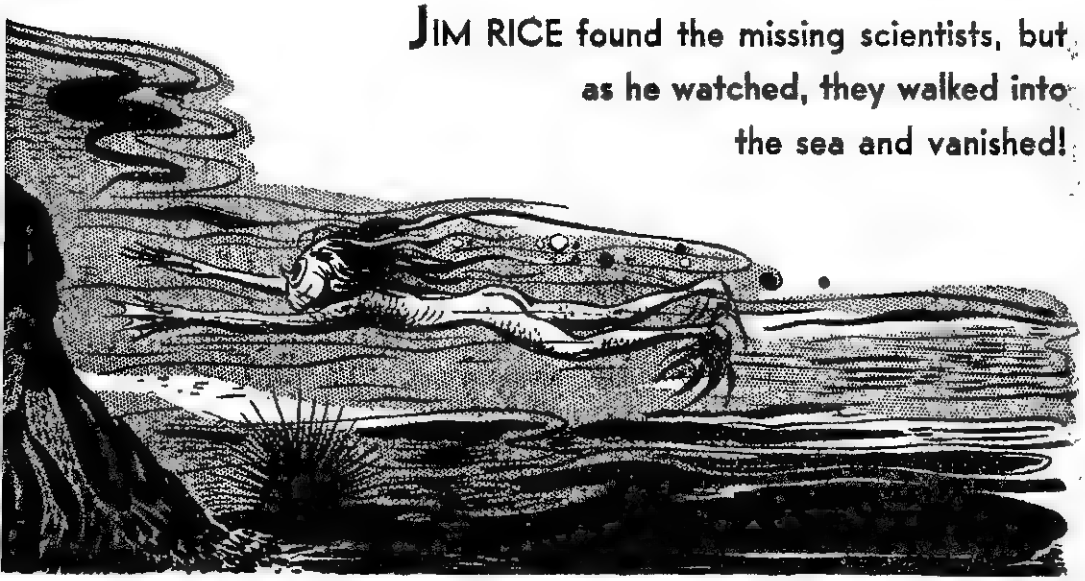
"She's still with him."

"But that's crazy—John wouldn't take her on a trip like that!"

"But he did! You know how Marion is, headstrong, just like her father. She thought it would be a great adventure to tag along."

Sloane raised a pudgy hand as Jim Rice opened his mouth to say something. "Don't blame me, Jim. *I* did my best to keep her here. So did John. But she wouldn't see it." He swore emphatically. "Those damned Venusians; if only we knew *what* they are and why they won't let us in the lowlands!"

Jim Rice nodded and inside his blood boiled. That question had been a headache ever since Earthmen had landed on Venus, for some sixty years, in fact. It had started with the famed Earth Scientist, Arnold Holter the first man to set foot on Venus. He had eventually gone into the lowlands which consisted of a chain of islands in the immensity of the Venusian Sea. He had never returned.



JIM RICE found the missing scientists, but as he watched, they walked into the sea and vanished!

Since then there had been many others. All had vanished completely. Searching parties had been sent out in force but without success.

As a Captain of Interplanetary Rangers Jim Rice had led his Patrol into the fog-covered lowlands, without orders, to find a group of vanished scientists. A number of the ships had crashed into uncharted ridges rising out of the seas as they skimmed over the surface. Men had been killed in the accident and Jim Rice had been kicked out of the Service. Now, though a social outcast, Carley Sloane had him on the Mining Project's payroll. For it had been Carley Sloane's men Jim Rice had been trying to find.

"I'm going out after them, Carley," Jim Rice said suddenly.

The Mining Executive shook his head. "Hell, Jim, I didn't mean for you to go sticking your neck into trouble out there . . ."

"Don't worry, Carley, I'm doing it because I want to. You forget that Marion is somewhere out there."

Carley Sloane looked at him. "I see. Still feel that way, eh? Yes." A frown crossed his face. "I can't give you much to go on, Jim. John kept in contact with me by televisor every hour or so. I checked his position with each contact as close as I could. Then yesterday he was suddenly cut off in the middle of a report. The screen just went blank and I couldn't raise him again."

Jim Rice shrugged. "I'm going to keep in touch with you, Carley. Check every report I send you. Map my position as near as you can. I'll have to do it alone. If I took help they'd only lay low until we were gone. This way maybe I can bring them out in the open. If I need help, I'll ask for it, and make sure you send it!"

Carley Sloane rose and gripped Jim Rice's hand.

"Right, Jim. I'll have plenty of help waiting. We've got to make those lowlands safe, Jim. The whole future of Venus rests there. Just make sure you don't take any unnecessary chances." He paused, heaving a sigh. "I'm sorry about Marion, Jim."

"So am I," Jim Rice replied grimly. "And so will a lot of Venusians be sorry if anything has happened to her."

He walked from the room and Carley Sloane slumped back into his chair. "A hell of a mess," he muttered.

FOG, gloomy and miserable, hung like a shroud over the Venusian Sea. The lowlands were barely visible through the murky weather and dim light that filtered through the massed cloudbanks. Jim Rice peered from the control room of his strato car at a chain of connected islands stretched in the vastness of water. These were the lowlands, dark, uncharted, forbidding.

His eyes were grim as he glanced at the wall chart. It checked with the directional beam indicator. Somewhere along this course John Brendel had flown. And somewhere ahead he had set his ship down. Rice clicked over the televisor switch. Carley Sloane's face sprang onto the plate.

"Any luck yet, Jim?"

"None. I wish these clouds would let some light through. I have practically to skim the surface to see anything."

Carley Sloane sighed. "Jim, I don't like to say it but I'm afraid it's hopeless. You better turn back—maybe if we notified Earth Government—"

"Earth Government, hell!" Jim Rice snapped out. "I'm not turning back. I'll find them if it's the last thing I do!" He switched off the set savagely and gazed at the dismal terrain below with angry eyes.

The minutes ticked off slowly. He glanced worriedly at his fuel register.

The rocket power of the strato car wouldn't last much longer; and he had to get back to Venus City. Defeat crept into his heart as he studied the murky vastness beneath him. Then suddenly he squinted.

A level expanse of land stretched off to the right of the ship. Barely visible at the edge of the water was a small dark mass. It was a strato car.

Jim Rice exclaimed: "That's it! That must be it!" Then his blood raced. There were two figures moving around the base of the ship.

Rice whipped his strato car around in a sharp turn. That must be Marion and John Brendel down there. Of course, something had happened to their ship and they were stranded. He kept his eyes on the two shadowy figures as his strato car neared the ground. Then a frown crossed his face.

The two figures ran from the grounded ship to the edge of the water and *disappeared!*

Jim Rice landed his strato car with a blast of rockets beside the other ship. Then he was out of the car and running down the beach to the water's edge.

He stopped there as bewilderment flooded his features.

"Where the hell did they go—?"

He turned back to the beach and looked at the sand.

There were two sets of footprints leading down to the water.

But they weren't *human* footprints! They were large damp *web*footprints! And then it was clear to Jim Rice. Those figures hadn't been John and Marion Brendel—they must have been Venusians!

He ran to the strato car on the beach. One glance inside was enough to tell him it was empty.

Icy fear struck at Jim Rice's heart. Since John and Marion Brendel weren't at the strato car there was only one other place they could have gone—*or been taken to!* The webbed footprints leading into the water! *Into the water!*

Jim Rice ran to his strato car. He rummaged in the supply room for a few moments and came out with a mass or rubber fabric, glass headpiece, and shoulder oxygen cylinders. He donned the suit hurriedly, adjusting the valves of the gas cylinders. There was a hiss of air as the headpiece filled with oxygen. He strapped on a knife belt and slipped a proton rifle over his shoulder. Then he was walking down the beach as fast as the cumbersome suit allowed. His feet followed the webfootprints to the edge of the beach until water closed hungrily over his legs.

The thought struck him as he strode into the depths that he should have contacted Carley Sloane to send help. But it was too late now. Water closed over his glassite headpiece.

THE surface of Venus had been dimly lit at best. Here in the Sea depths it was almost totally dark. Rice could barely see a few feet in front of him as he walked on. He cursed himself for not bringing a magnesium flash. He'd never find anything he couldn't see. And the thought grew inside him that maybe *others* would see him first.

Something snaky coiled around him from behind.

Jim Rice felt himself being pulled from his feet and tore futilely at the coiled mass around his waist. His hand sought the knife strapped to his belt. He whipped it free and struck out behind him with a savage thrust. The blade sank deep into soft, yielding flesh. There was a spasmodic threshing behind him and the coils loosened from around his waist.

Rice twisted, striking out again with the knife. A huge bulbous mass floating in the water behind him. Long thick

tentacles writhed in the water. Jim Rice backed hurriedly away. It was a huge Venusian octopus and the blade had found its vital organs in that bulbous mass. A black inky fluid spread in the water around the creature as it writhed in a death agony.

The slope of the sea bottom was ever downward. The Spaceman plodded on. A myriad of underwater life floated around him; creatures and plant life defying terrestrial description. Something massive loomed ahead.

Jim Rice approached cautiously; but it was only a huge formation of rock jutting from the sea bottom. He walked up to it and around the base. He stopped.

A weird creature sat on a lump of rock before him. It had a semihuman shape with webbed projections for arms and legs. Elongated tendrils jutted from its face and head and its eyes were lidless and bulging. A group of similar, smaller creatures moved about gazing up at the other.

Jim Rice edged back behind the rock formation, his heart pounding. They hadn't seen him, he was sure. His hand groped for the proton rifle slung over his shoulder. He gripped it and stepped around the rock ready to fire.

The creatures were gone.

Jim Rice stared around bewilderedly. It had been only a few seconds since he had discovered them. Where had they gone? Anger coursed through him and he stepped forward. The murky depths suddenly became alive with flashing bodies.

The proton rifle was pulled from his hands before he had time to swing it around. Webbed arms closed over his body from head to foot. Vainly he sought to free his hand to use his knife. It was useless. One of the creatures tore at the air hose on his back. It pulled away with a hiss of air bubbles. Only the automatic check valve kept the water from pouring into the glassite helmet. Jim Rice struggled desperately. They were all around him, grasping, pulling, tearing. Blood pounded in his head as the oxygen still remaining in the headpiece dwindled away. His vision blurred and his struggles became feeble.

"I'VE expected a visit from the Interplanetary Rangers for a long time, but not from one of its disgraced members. Ex-Captain Rice, isn't it?"

The speaker, a tall well-built man with grayed hair and a jutting jaw sat in a large hall filled with green-scaled Venusians. Jim Rice stood swaying unsteadily on his feet. His marine suit was gone as were his weapons. His head still buzzed.

He glanced around him confusedly, then his gaze centered on the man smiling sardonically at him. Above a large globe hung, emitting a bright dazzling radiance. Its rays formed a sort of halo over the man. The Venusians' fish-like eyes were fastened on this globe and the man sitting beneath it. There was something pathetic in their gaze. It was as if a weird fascination held them transfixed.

Rice switched his gaze from the Venusians back to the dais. He gazed closely at the man sitting there. The rugged features were strangely familiar.

"Yes, I'm Rice," Jim said slowly. "And if you don't mind I'd like to know just what this is all about—?" He pointed to the gathered Venusians. The creatures appeared to ignore him, their gaze was rapturously held by the dazzling light.

"One thing at a time," the man replied.

A commotion grew in the rear of the hall. Jim Rice turned. Two green-scaled Venusians were dragging a struggling girl into the room.

"Marion!" Rice cried out. He dove through the Venusian ranks. His fist crashed into a green face on the girl's left. The creature slumped to the floor. Behind him a voice shouted. Webbed arms closed about Jim Rice and bore him to the floor. The voice shouted again. The Venusians dragged the two humans forward and shoved them toward the speaker.

"The age of chivalry reborn," the voice mocked from beneath the light. Jim Rice edged over to the girl and slipped his arm about her. She was sobbing quietly.

"Jim, why did you have to come, too? His creatures captured us on the beach . . ." She shuddered, glancing at the Venusians.

"Captured is a word I prefer not to use. Let us say you are my uninvited guests."

"He's crazy, Jim!" the girl cried out. "He's going to kill us all—he's taken Dad away already!"

Jim Rice forced himself to remain calm. But anger was a fire inside him. His eyes met the steely grey gaze of his captor.

The man said, "John Brendel is not dead, rest assured. I have more use for him alive. At present the same applies to you, Rice. As to who I am—"

"He's Arnold Holter, Jim!" the girl cried out.

Arnold Holter! Of course! Rice had seen pictures of the famed Earth scientist. But Arnold Holter *alive?* He had been over fifty years old six decades ago—and this man wasn't much more than fifty now!

The steely grey eyes stared at Jim Rice.

"Yes, I am Arnold Holter. Does my age surprise you? You can't believe it; but it's true—and I won't appear older fifty years from now!"

Jim Rice gazed at him. "It's incredible—I remember you as one of the foremost scientists of Earth over a century ago . . ."

"Not one of the foremost scientists!" Holter snarled. "*The* foremost! Here in the lowlands I have discovered a new radio-active element that will prolong my life span indefinitely! I can live to rule Venus and eventually the entire Solar System!"

"You're crazy, Holter! Do you think you can overcome the might of Earth Science with a band of amphibious creatures?"

ARNOLD HOLTER laughed. "These Venusians may appear to be unintelligent by your Earth standards, but I can assure you they have developed a highly scientific civilization. They built an underwater city which I have turned to full advantage. You are in a part of it now, a full mile beneath the surface! I have developed atomic hydraulic principles which enable me to raise it to the surface at will. The city is impregnable here on the sea bottom, and no Earthman even guesses at its existence.

"And I happen to know you have no help coming. I covered every report you televised back to Venus City. Even if you had, what good would it do you now?" He paused letting the words sink in. The sardonic grin was frozen on his face. "As to the might of Earth Science, you're wrong! The radio-active forces I have discovered will be my greatest weapon! Concentrations of its rays will destroy life utterly! I'll wipe out Earth Science and resistance before the full realization of what is happening strikes them!"

"What do you plan to do with us?" Jim Rice asked slowly.

"That can be left up to you, Rice. I have a use for a man with a thorough knowledge of military tactics. I could

make you an important man on Venus. You'd have power and authority. After all, what has allegiance to Earth gained you so far? You've been kicked out of the Interplanetary Rangers and your name is on the blacklist of the Earth Government. You see, I am well informed as to what happens outside my marine domain. You've got talent and initiative, two qualities I admire. Why not join forces with me? You have everything to gain!"

"What if I refuse?" Rice asked.

Holter shrugged. "I have other means of gaining your allegiance if I want it. Just as I mastered the scientists who so conveniently *disappeared* in my lowlands. A drug injected in the veins will make a man a willing subject to my commands. Unfortunately, however, the drug suppresses initiative, making a man nothing more than a robot. Since you have no scientific knowledge I can use and since military strategy requires initiative, I won't waste the drug on you. There's always death as an answer." He paused and turned his gaze to Marion Brendel. "Or, of course, there's always Miss Brendel."

Jim Rice breathed heavily. He gazed for a long moment at the girl.

"Your argument is pretty good, Holter, but I'd like a little time to think it over."

Holter gazed coldly at Rice. "Unfortunately there isn't much time. My plans are nearing completion and I'm ready to act. I'll give you a few hours for your decision. No more. John Brendel hasn't seen fit to comply with my advice, so I may have to make him a willing subject. What you decide will affect Miss Brendel as well."

Holter turned his gaze to the silent mass of Venusians—still staring at the dazzling globe. A mumble of alien sounds left his lips. Instantly a group of Venusians hustled Rice and the girl from the chamber and out into a huge courtyard.

JIM RICE stared in awe at the underwater city as they were led forward. Overhead a huge dome curved over the city like a mammoth bubble. The Venusian sea extended above the dome for a full mile to the surface. Low squat buildings comprised the majority of the Venusian dwellings. They ran on for nearly a mile in close formations.

There were two things that made Jim Rice frown worriedly as they continued on across the courtyard. One of them was the massed rows of trim rocket cruisers that lay off to the left. Sleek little crafts with a long slim barrel set in the nose of each ship. Rice had a vision of death rays spouting from those weapons, annihilating Venus City with a radio-active bombardment. The other thing was the tall structure off to the left of the courtyard. It was a tower that reared above the rest of the city. At its top a huge globe cast a dazzlingly brilliant light over the city. It was a miniature sun, blinding.

And here again Jim Rice noted the fanatical way the Venusians gazed at the tower—in much the same manner he had noted back in the Overlord's chamber. It was as if the radiance held a strange influence over them from which they couldn't tear their gaze.

A few minutes later they were confined in a room, small and barren. Four blank walls stared at him with only a single barred opening in the ceiling through which light filtered from the tower outside.

"Jim, what are you going to do?" Marion Brendel asked.

"You mean about Holter's ultimatum?—Stall him off as long as I can. Maybe we'll find a way out of here before . . ."

"Then you're going to refuse him?" A gladness spread over her face.

"Let's forget about that for awhile." His face showed concern and he paced the small confines of the room. "If I could only get word back to Carley Sloane . . . Did you notice the way those Venusians kept looking at the light outside and back at Holter? There's something there that I just don't get."

The girl rested her hand on Jim's arm. Her lips trembled.

"Jim, what do you think he'll do with Dad? Do you really think he has a drug that can make a man a slave—?"

"He's probably bluffing." Rice reached inside his shirt and drew out a cigarette and magnesium lighter. As he raised the lighter to his lips the door burst open and John Brendel was shoved into the cell by two Venusians. The Venusians stood in the doorway for a moment as the girl ran to her father. But they weren't looking at her; their gaze was fixed on Jim Rice.

The lighter burned with a small brilliant flame. It was then that Jim Rice noticed the awed expression on the Venusian faces. They were staring at the flame. The lighter clicked off. Instantly the awed expression vanished. Jim Rice stared at the creatures. He switched on the flame again. The awed expression returned to the Venusians. Jim Rice snapped the light off. The Venusians scurried from the room. The door clanged shut behind them. Rice strode over to it and tried it. It was locked. He turned excitedly to John Brendel.

"Brendel! Did you notice—?"

JOHN BRENDEL held his daughter tightly. He gazed through hopeless eyes at Jim Rice.

"So he got you, too, Jim. I suppose you know what's going on here? That it's only a matter of hours before Earthmen will be wiped from the face of Venus by that madman?"

Jim Rice nodded grimly. "If he succeeds, yes. I wondered what kind of a hold he had on those Venusians. It didn't ring true that an Earthman could step in and become overlord of an alien race so easily. I'm sure now that it has something to do with that tower—"

John Brendel released his daughter and faced Rice. "Of course. I guessed that right away. It's the dazzling radiance—the Venusians have never seen the sun, you know how dark the surface of the planet is. To their minds a dazzling light has some sort of hypnotic influence, and years ago when Holter first came to the lowlands he discovered that bright light affected the Venusians like a hypnotic drug. He's used his scientific knowledge to produce that dazzling miniature sun in the tower. With it he holds the Venusians in mute slavery. They'll do whatever he commands."

"What if the light were suddenly taken away—what then?"

John Brendel stared thoughtfully.

"I don't know. The spell might be broken—but what good does it do us? Holter took me on a tour of the city a few hours ago. He even showed me the radio-active ray that he'll use to destroy Venus City. Those ships outside are equipped with the weapon. When the city rises to the surface, those ships, manned by Venusians will take off. And that time is close. He's been planning this moment for years. He knows that officials at Venus City are getting more than interested in the lowlands and that soon there'll be a mass investigation. By acting now his attack will come as a complete surprise."

Jim Rice wheeled around. "John, we've got to get out of here before then."

John Brendel forced a laugh. "That's easier said than done."

"Not quite," Rice said grimly. "I want you to do exactly what I say." He took the magnesium lighter from his pocket and handed it to the scientist. "When that door opens and a Venusian sticks his head in, switch on the flame . . ." His voice trailed off as a deep rumbling shook the room. The walls trembled slightly and there was a rocking sensation. A loud hum grew from somewhere below them.

"What's happening?" Marion Brendel cried out.

Brendel's face was grave. "I'm not sure but I think we're being raised to the surface. That sounds like the atomic hydraulics Holter spoke about. He's acting sooner than I expected. We're too late now."

Jim Rice slipped over to the door. He kicked loudly on it. The noise reverberated over the rumbling hum. He continued to kick until there was a scraping outside. Then he stepped back and motioned to the scientist. John Brendel nodded.

The door opened and an armed Venusian stood in the doorway. Brendel switched on the magnesium lighter. The Venusian stared at the brilliant flame dumbly. Rice sprang from behind the open door. His fist cracked into the Venusian's face. The creature slumped forward to the floor under the blow. Rice knelt and grasped the weapon from the webbed hand. He glanced swiftly into the narrow passage outside the door. Then he turned back into the room.

"NOW listen, we've got to work fast. It's a long shot, but it may work. Holter will be ready to send those ships out as soon as we surface. You and Marion stay in this building. Keep your eye on the tower. When that light goes out make a dash for the nearest rocket cruiser out in the courtyard. If you succeed in snatching it, send Carley Sloane a warning over the televisor. Then blast out of here as fast as you can."

He handed the gun over to the scientist and took the magnesium lighter. He gazed at them both for a moment and then strode over the unconscious Venusian and out into the corridor. Ahead loomed the entrance to the courtyard.

Rice paused on the threshold. The courtyard was alive with Venusians. A few hundred yards away stood the tower with its blazing globe. Overhead, beyond the dome, gray waters seethed as the city rose to the surface. Rice took a deep breath and walked into the courtyard.

He walked slowly and directly toward the tower. It was a few moments before any of the Venusians saw him. Instantly a confused jargon of cries split the air. A number of them ran toward him. Jim Rice continued his advance.

A group of Venusians were almost upon him when Jim Rice switched on the magnesium lighter. The brilliant white flame spouted as he held it up before him.

The Venusians stopped in their tracks. Their bulging eyes stared in rapt awe at the flame. There was a grimness around the Spaceman's mouth as he advanced purposefully through them. They didn't attempt to stop him, but fell in behind him, their eyes glued to the white magnesium flame.

Sweat stood out on Rice's forehead as the distance between him and the tower diminished. His eye was fastened on an open doorway in its base. It was only fifty yards away.

The magnesium in the lighter burned out.

Jim Rice swore as the flame vanished. Behind him he heard mixed shouts from the Venusians. They raced down upon him.

He sprinted the remaining distance to the tower. As he reached the base of the tower, a webbed arm closed over his shoulder. He dove inside dragging the Venusian along with him. His foot slammed the door shut and he struck out savagely with his fist. The Venusian crumpled with a mumbled cry. Even as the creature sagged Jim rammed the lock home on the door. A loud clamor rose outside as the massed Venusians hit the door. It held.

His breath burning in his throat, Rice turned and raced up a spiral stairway leading to the top of the tower. The door below would only hold for a short time he knew. He reached the top of the stairway and a half open doorway. He swept into the room.

Holter stood facing him with a proton pistol leveled.

"I'VE been watching you from up here, Rice. That was a very ingenious method you used to get to the tower. You do have initiative. But I'm afraid you don't see things my way. I'll have to dispose of you now. As you see, I've advanced my plans somewhat. We're breaking surface. In a few moments my ships will take off for Venus City. After today I alone will rule on Venus!"

"You'll never get away with this, Holter."

"Oh, won't I?" The proton pistol leveled at Jim Rice.

Rice hurled himself aside. There was a sizzling blast as the weapon discharged. Jim Rice felt a searing pain burn into his side. Then he had moved under the weapon and his fist drove into Holter's jaw. The man staggered back with a sharp cry. Jim followed it up with a sharp knee kick into Holter's stomach. Then he wrenched the weapon from Holter's hand and brought the butt down over the man's head. Holter fell limply.

Rice ran swiftly to one of the windows overlooking the courtyard. The city had already surfaced and the curved dome covering it was rolling back. Below in the courtyard Venusians were scurrying toward waiting ships. Directly overhead the huge globe spread its dazzling radiance over the city. Rice looked at it helplessly, the proton gun clutched in his hand. From somewhere below he heard a loud crash. That would be the door to the tower. The Venusians would be pouring in. Even as the thought crossed his mind a green-scaled creature came through the doorway.

The Venusian stopped short at sight of Holter unconscious on the floor. A loud cry burst from his lips and he charged at Jim Rice.

One thought pounded in Jim Rice's mind. The light. He must get the light. Savagely he smashed the glass of the control room with the butt of the weapon. He kicked out at the same time and caught the charging Venusian with his foot. The creature collapsed, writhing. But others poured in through the door. And Holter was stirring on the floor.

In a single movement Jim Rice leaned out of the window casing and fired the proton gun straight into the dazzling globe. There was a blast of flame as a tremendous explosion disintegrated the globe, showering fragments down the sides of the tower.

The light vanished.

It was as if a miniature sun had suddenly been extinguished. The city was instantly plunged into semi-darkness. Only the murky light that filtered through the overhead clouds remained.

Jim Rice twisted back into the room, the gun held ready.

It wasn't necessary. The Venusians stood transfixed. It was as if their life blood were being drained from them with the cessation of the light. There was confusion, bewilderment, and terror in their faces. Then a jargon of sounds came from their throats and they turned, ran.

The same pandemonium had broken loose in the city below. A few of the ships had taken off, but they were flying in aimless circles over the city. It was as if the directing mind over a powerful body had been suddenly severed leaving the limbs flapping helplessly.

A hoarse cry burst out behind him. Rice wheeled as a body crashed into him knocking the gun from his hand. Holter, his eyes blazing hatefully, smashed into the spaceman.

"You'll die for this!" Holter roared. His fist crashed into Jim Rice's injured side and the pain was an agony. He fell back weakly over the edge of the window casement. Strong hands grasped at his throat, strangling. The blood pounded in Jim's head. His back seemed about to break. Jim Rice twisted sideways. He reached down and grasped the overlord behind the knees. Then he butted his head into the scientist's face. The man relaxed his grip on Jim Rice's throat for an instant. The spaceman acted. Muscles straining, he pulled savagely upward. The overlord's body hurtled over his shoulder through the window. A loud scream echoed as he fell. A loud plop stopped it. But Jim Rice wasn't aware of it. The burn in his side from the overlord's proton blast engulfed him. Dizziness overwhelmed his senses and a blackness closed over his mind.

"I STILL don't see how the devil you got there so fast, Carley." Jim Rice was sitting in the Mining Executive's office at Venus City. His side was bandaged in rolls of gauze. John and Marion Brendel sat beside him. Carley Sloane popped his feet atop the desk and waved a pudgy hand in the air.

"Hell, Jim, when your reports ceased I knew that something had happened. I sent out every ship I could muster. Just before we got to the position of your last televised report we got a message from John through one of the Venusian cruisers. We came in blasting . . . But how you managed to put that city at our mercy before we got there is more than I can understand!"

Jim Rice let a smile cross his features.

"The real credit goes to John. He knew that the Venusians were being held under a hypnotic spell by that miniature sun radiance. The Venusians naturally had never seen the sun or any bright light. Holter found out that a brilliant light had a hypnotic influence over them. That's how he was able to control their city. I guessed that if I could destroy that light before the Venusians took off, the spell would be broken temporarily. With a small magnesium lighter and a hell of a lot of luck I succeeded. And I was right. From now on we won't have to worry about the lowlands and Earth Government can control the Venusians. You and John can look into that new radio-active element. From what Holter said and evidenced, it will aid Earth in more than one way."

Carley Sloane had a satisfied look on his face.

"I begin to see the light," he said.

Jim Rice grinned and walked over to the girl. "Come on, honey, let's go find a nice quiet place to eat. I'm hungry."

They didn't do much eating.

Meet the Authors

IT'S been a long time since I've been able to say anything in good old AMAZING, but they always say, good things mellow and ripen with age! One thing is sure though, a lot of water has passed under the bridge since my last yarn adorned these pages. It's almost like a dream when I look back and say: Born June 14, 1921, reared in this great city of Chicago—Univ. of Chicago in 1940—and the good old fan days. Possibly some of you still remember STARDUST, the slick paper fan magazine I edited in '39 and '40. Those were the good old days, when none of us thought of the "little yellow men" with anything but contempt.

Now, like most other young Americans, I'm part of Uncle Sam's armed forces. I joined up in November '42. Went through the inevitable training every Infantry soldier (God bless them!) goes through, and after much toil and trouble, got my commission last June in '43.

Since then I've been taking part in training and maneuvers preparatory to the "big hop over." Which leads to what proved to be quite an experience for me. On one of these maneuvers a land mine went off too close for comfort—and I landed in an army hospital. I've since been released from that worthy establishment (after much "observation and treatment") and am awaiting the next step. One thing I got out of it was the loss of hearing in my right ear.

I understand that I am the only Infantryman in this issue. I consider this somewhat of an honor. For while the boys in our Air Corps are doing one hell of a splendid job, the good old Infantry is the backbone of our operations. And boy, let me tell you that backbone can get mighty sore! But that's one thing American soldiers have—a strong backbone! And we're proving it on all fronts.

LT. WILLIAM LAWRENCE HAMLING

There isn't much more to say now. We'll be able to say a lot more when this is all over. And when that time comes I hope to see you frequently in these pages. So I'll be seeing you . . .

HAVE YOU GOT IT?

Check Yourself for Symptoms of ATHLETE'S FOOT

☐ Cracks, peeling between toes ☐ Itching ☐ Soggy skin

New scientific 2-way treatment with QUINSANA powder—on feet and in shoes—is producing amazing results. In tests on thousands of persons, practically all cases of Athlete's Foot cleared up quickly with Quinsana—used today by millions.

MATCHES AND KINGS

By Cpl. JOHN YORK CABOT

Klobar took advantage of the fact that superstition overrules human reason to make himself the world's richest man!

ILLUSTRATED BY PFC. JULIAN S. KRUPA.

IT'S FUNNY what you can learn and hear in the Army if you keep your ears open and your eyes sharp. And in general bull sessions like we were having this one particular night, you very often run across some startling information.

We'd thoroughly covered sex and politics, and used up all the rumors that we knew. Somehow or other the conversation got around to superstitions.

Callahan, the short, stocky armorer with the easy smile and the thick mop of black hair, was holding the floor.

"This guy I'm talking about, from the old Nineteenth Bomb Group, never made a mission without that god-awful yellow scarf of his—even on the low altitude jobs when it was hot as hell. He'd always have it wrapped around his neck."

Nolan, the ball turret gunner, nodded solemnly.

"That's easy understood," he said. "Me, I'll never get caught up there without I have my special lucky socks on. And I ain't washing 'em either, until the duration and six months is over."

I made the mistake of taking out a pack of PM's. Callahan grinned.

"Thanks, chum. How'd you know I felt like a smoke?"

Nolan put his hand out. "Pass 'em around."

Fenwick, the crew chief and top turret gunner, said: "Me too."

Viborg, the big, blond husky who was our radio gunner, smiled apologetically and said he'd have one.

When the pack came back to me it was six lighter than it had been thirty seconds before. And of course, none of the so-and-so's had a match.

"I ought to make you lugs rub flints for a light," I said, striking a match. "Here."

I lighted Nolan's, Callahan's, and extended the flaming match to Fenwick.

"Uh-uh!" He shook his head and backed off.

I grinned. "Superstitious?" I extended the match to Viborg. To my surprise he shook his head. "You too, Vi?"

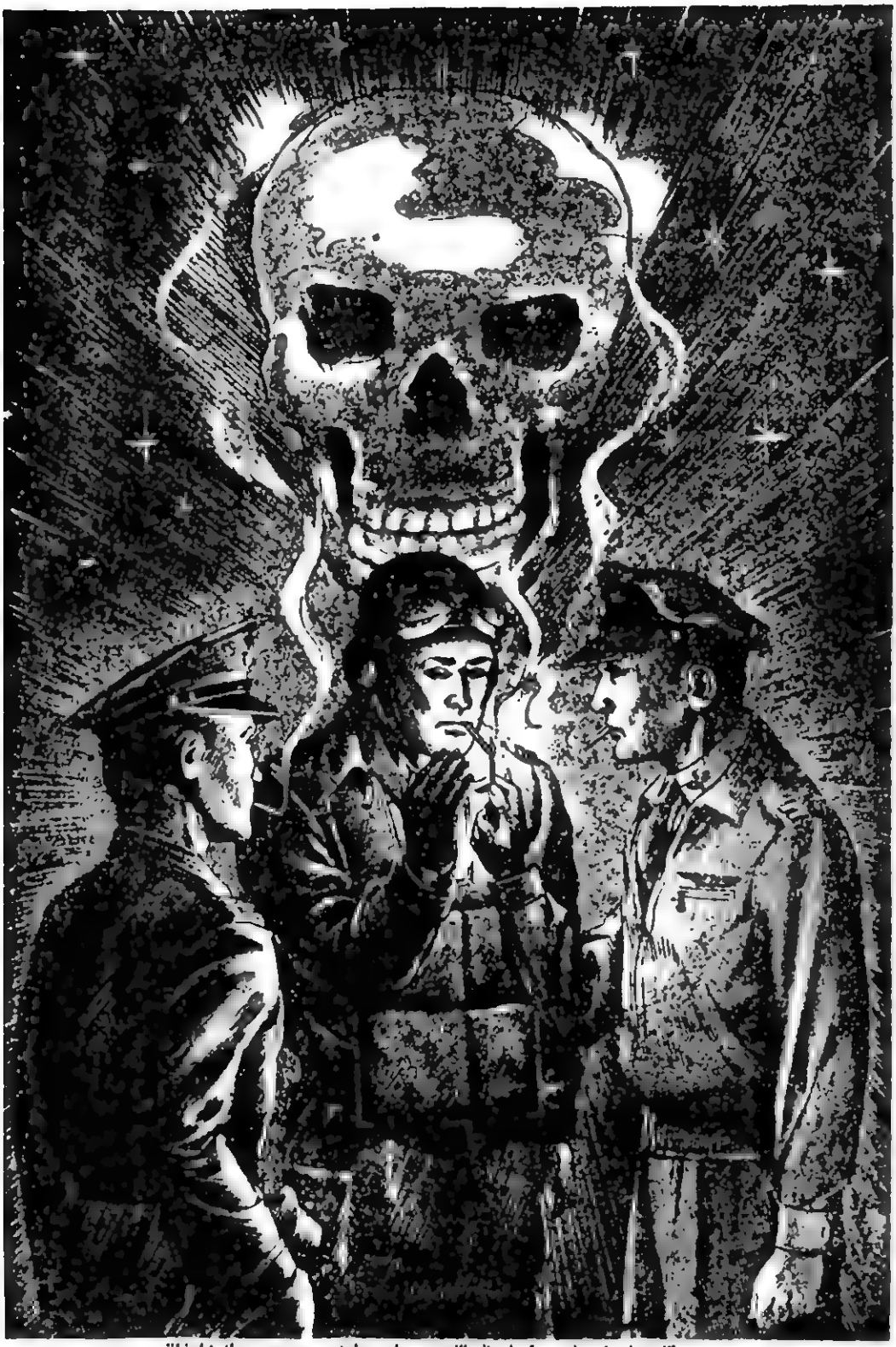
I tossed the match aside, struck a fresh one.

"You're damned right I'm superstitious on that point," Fenwick said. "No three on a match for me."

"Pah," Nolan snorted. "That's as old as the hills. It doesn't bother me."

"Nor me," said Callahan.

I was looking questioningly at Viborg. The big Swede was smart as hell, an old Oxford boy. He had more



"Light three on a match and one will die before day is done!"

brains than Nolan and Callahan combined. I was amused by this reaction of his.

"How come it gets you, Vi?"

His grin was sheepish. "It is rather silly, isn't it?"

Fenwick broke in. "Silly, hell. I'm not ashamed to admit I won't three-light on anybody's match. That's been bad luck too long for me to run against it."

"Not so long," Nolan said.

"Goes back hundreds of years, even before matches," Fenwick said.

I shook my head. "I don't think so," I said. "I think it started in the last war, didn't it?"

"How about it, Vi?" Fenwick asked. He took the big blond's word as final in any argument.

"It started in the last war," Viborg said slowly. "He's right, Fen."

Nolan looked triumphant. Fenwick colored. "Well, anyway," Fenwick said, "it was proved in the last war that every time three guys used the same match, one of 'em got knocked off within twenty-four hours."

"Proved!" Nolan snorted in typical barracks-room-debate fashion. "Yah, proved my foot. How you know it was proved?"

"From people who were in the last war," Fenwick said. "That's how." He turned to Viborg. "Isn't that right, Vi?"

Viborg shook his head neutrally. "I don't know if that happened or not," he said. "But I do know how the superstition started. It was started by one man. I worked for that man, many years later."

Our curiosity was instantaneous.

"Who was that, Vi?" I demanded.

"Yeah, yeah, who?" the others chorused.

"Klobar," Viborg said. "Lars Klobar, the Match King. Have any of you any recollection of his name?"

I was thinking back. Then, of course, the name came back. I remembered. Viborg was looking at me, and I nodded.

"Sure I remember him. Fabulously wealthy Swedish industrialist, wasn't he? Made his millions manufacturing matches? When did you work for him, Vi?"

"In Paris," Viborg said. "In the year or more preceding his death in the early thirties. Nineteen thirty-three, to be exact. I was just out of Oxford, and had gone to Paris to look for a job. Jobs were hard to get then, remember? Well, I didn't get the kind of work I had come there for, but I did land this job with Lars Klobar, who had just come to Paris for an indefinite stay while he completed some business he had there."

"What kind of a job?" Nolan broke in.

"I was a sort of secretary, bodyguard, masseur and dogwalker," Viborg smiled. Then his face went thoughtful as he continued. I'll tell you the story as he told it to us . . .

LARS KLOBAR (Viborg said) was an incredible man. I knew that from the first time I met him. I knew it even after his death. He was every inch a tycoon, just as you see tycoons pictured in Hollywood films. He was a short, robust, pink-faced fellow. His dress was always impeccable, his nimble fingers were literally weighted with diamonds.

He was in his early forties when I went to work for him. A genius, an industrial genius, in the prime of life, at the peak of his career. His fortune was legend on the Continent and in England. His power, financially and politically, was greater than any monarch's or prime minister's.

It is good to recall, in thinking of

this man Klobar, that the international financial world was in chaotic times, then. The great depression was a world-wide thing. Nations were in bankruptcy. Millionaires had lost everything. But Klobar, amid this chaos, had become even more powerful than he had ever been.

He had made his money in matches. A staggering fortune, that earned him his title of the Match King. But his career had gone far beyond that of a mere match manufacturer. His interests now were in many new fields, finance, oil, shipping, mining, industry. Nonetheless, he still savored the days of his early financial climb, and dearly loved to be thought of as Klobar, the Match King.

He paid me well, though the job I had with him was one in which he might call on me at any hour of the day or night to fulfill any sort of sudden whim. He was a restless man, Lars Klobar, and fired with the energy of two dozen men. Many nights he would rout me from bed, well after midnight, and order me to accompany him of long walks through the almost deserted streets of Paris. Unable to sleep, these nocturnal hikes of his provided an energy outlet that left him weary enough, at last, to slumber.

It was through his conversations on these walks that I got to know Lars Klobar most closely. In them he told me much about his life, from his childhood in Copenhagen, through to his present rise. It was on one such walk as these that he confided to me that he had started the match superstition.

Paid agents of his had cleverly, thoroughly, patiently spread the rumor that soldiers in the first war found their luck turn against them when they were the third men to light cigarettes from one match. Death, so Klobar's concocted rumor went, came to the unfortunate third soon after.

"It was pure fiction, of course," Klobar told me, laughing proudly at the invention. "Not a shred of truth to back the superstitious posh. But you can imagine what it did to my match industry. It more than tripled the use of matches within the first month of its circulation. And when the war had ended, and the soldiers returned to their own homes and own lands to spread the fable, it caught on like wildfire."

"It was an imaginative way to increase your business." I admitted.

"And simple, my boy," Klobar had chortled. "Always remember this—the quickest way to the public is not through its mind, but through its imagination."

THE conversation on that particular midnight stroll stuck in my mind for a long time thereafter. I was able to see the fabulous Lars Klobar use the public imagination in many more subtle ways than rumor in the days that followed. His entire empire was constructed on the groundwork of public imagination. There was something magical about the way in which his manipulations invariably caught public fancy. Just as there had been something cleverly, diabolically, magical in the match superstition which had made him fantastically rich.

I remembered that conversation particularly well, however, about a month after it had taken place. Klobar was having a conference in his office with a certain Romanian Baron. He had called me in to take notes on the discussion.

"You may smoke, Viborg," he told me.

I thanked him, found my cigarettes. As I was about to light a smoke, Klobar produced a box of expensive cigars, extended them to the Baron, took one

himself.

I lighted the Baron's cigar.

"Yours next," the Match King insisted as I extended the match to him. Knowing his idiocyncrasies as to courtesy, I lighted my cigarette, then held the match to his cigar.

To my utter amazement, he shook his head.

"No, Viborg. I will not be third on a match," Klobar said.

I stared at him half a moment in surprise, trying to see if he was actually serious. He was indeed serious. Deadly serious. He who had himself invented the fable.

I blew out the match, lighted Klobar's cigar with another, and the incident passed. However, later that day, as I was attending to some correspondence for him, Klobar the Match King, called me into his study.

He was smiling, as if at some secret joke, and I wondered what was wrong.

"You were surprised today, eh, Viborg?" he said.

And then, of course, I realized my expression when he'd refused to be third on a match must have been too evident for him to miss.

"Yes, I was surprised, sir," I admitted.

"You wondered why I should be a victim of my own posh superstition," Klobar went on amiably. "And I don't blame you. However, I think you may learn something from that incident. You see, from the time that I started that three on a match superstition, many years ago, until today, I have always lived by the letter of the law I myself started. I have always refused to be third on a match. You wonder why?"

I admitted that I had, indeed, been wondering why.

"It is not that I believe one iota of that preposterous superstition creation of mine," Klobar said. "It is merely that, in refusing to be a third on a match, I am paying homage to something which has paid me fabulously more than homage, something that has paid me beyond my wildest dreams of fortune. You see, in abiding by the superstition, I am holding fast to a symbol that gave me the beginning of all I own today. I am cherishing that symbol, perpetuating it. I would feel guilty if I were to ignore it."

I was silent.

"Do you see what I mean, Viborg?" he asked.

I nodded. "I think I do, sir," I told him.

He nodded. "It will grow clearer to you as you think it over," he said. "Its basic moral principle is merely that one should not disown the humble factors which have contributed to his success."

"I see what you mean, sir," I said.

"Good," he beamed. "Understand, I am not ass enough to follow the fables of my own imagination. I am not stupid enough to associate genuine superstition with my own commercial creation. It is, and always will be, so much rubbish. But I acknowledge it for what it has meant to me. That is all, Viborg."

That was all he ever said about it, even in the months that followed when, on various occasions, I saw him publicly and privately refusing to be a third on a match. Sometimes, when this happened, he would catch my eye and smile slyly as if at some secret jest between the two of us, but never vocally did he mention it again.

IT WAS ten months later that the whole of Continental Europe was shaken by a series of financial upheavals. It was a time of great crisis in even the highest of European banking houses. It was, in fact, a vicious backtide of the great depression. The entire

economic structure of the old world, during those perilous weeks, was tottering badly.

Among the great industrial holdings threatened by disaster was Klobar's, perhaps the greatest of them all.

Rumor and public imagination, which Klobar had so often and so successfully employed for his own gain, was working against him this time. There was not a financial name, not a financial house, not a great industry, that was not plagued with rumor of decay, corruption, disaster.

These rumors were becoming a tidal wave sweeping everything before it. Many great men were helpless to stem the wave, and perished because of it. Klobar, however, rose above the rest. In those weeks of crisis, he worked with the fury of one possessed. At his telephone's reach, were the greatest dignitaries in Europe, the most glittering banking names in the world. I was with him eighteen, and sometimes twenty-four, hours a day during that crisis.

He was a man fighting for a fortune seldom seen in the world before or after. He was a man fighting for his very life. And he was doing it admirably, coolly, and calling on every stratagem his incredible mind could think of.

A Frenchman, DuPres, who was president of one of Klobar's subsidiary holding companies, committed suicide during that period. He had given up hope that the Klobar interests could ever survive; he had been washed away by the tidal wave of panic. I recall the afternoon Klobar learned of his underling's suicide.

"The fool," he said. "The cowardly fool. He has given fresh fuel to the rumor mongers. We must do all we can to repair the damage his blundering cowardice has caused."

And to a great extent, he was able to repair it. Later that day, however, Klobar looked up for a moment and asked me a startling question.

"What do you think of the House of Klobar?"

I was taken aback. I didn't know what to say.

"You know what I mean," Klobar insisted. "Do you think we will weather the storm. Do you think our ship is sound enough? Give me the truth. I am not seeking solace, I am merely polling an attitude."

"I think our ship will come through, sir," I said. And I meant it sincerely. With a captain like Klobar at the helm, any vessel could weather any storm.

"But do you think we're sound?" Klobar insisted.

"I do, sir," I told him. Again I spoke truthfully.

He smiled. For an instant he seemed to hesitate.

"Viborg," he said suddenly. "You are right on one count, wrong on the other. We will come through. They cannot defeat me. But our ship is not sound. It is rotten to the core. DuPres knew it. He knew the House of Klobar was a house of cards. That is why he killed himself rather than face what he thought would be horrible disaster."

I WAS astounded. Klobar read my expression.

"Perhaps I have disillusioned you, Viborg," he said. "But I think the truth, when you are able to digest it, will not hurt. Yes, our house is of rotten timber. It is an empty thing, a thing of paper, foolscap, sham. I constructed it out of nothing, and it is nothing, at this moment. But, in the public imagination it has substance, prestige. I have constructed my fabulous empire with nothing for credit but the public imagination. Remember once I told you the value of imagi-

nation? Well, the House of Klobar, the holdings of the Match King, are all constructed on nothing more solid then the public fancy I was able to mold. You are shocked?"

"I . . . I . . ." I stammered, ". . . don't know what to say."

He waved his hand. "Think it over, and watch us ride the storm. We will not go down. The public imagination has broken loose and runs amuck against me. But I will tame it once more. You shall see."

I was about to say something, when one of Klobar's managers came excitedly into the office. The man was pale, over-worked, obviously worried, and even more obviously distraught at a recent bad turn of events.

"What is it now, Jacques?" Klobar demanded of the man, seeing instantly that he brought bad news.

"Starssen," the fellow blurted. "Starssen has followed DuPres!"

Igor Starssen was another puppet president of a Klobar holding company. A legendary banking figure, Starssen had been, nonetheless, a mere figurehead for Klobar for years. The news of his suicide was definitely a blow. But Klobar didn't wince.

"Another coward," he snorted. "A coward and a fool. I knew Starssen was a fool long ago, but I didn't think him such an utter one. Well, there is nothing to do but repair that damage, if we can."

The manager, Jacques, lighted a cigarette. His hands were shaking badly. I took the match from him, lighted a cigarette for myself. My hands, too, were not too steady. Klobar saw our state of nerves instantly, and stepped into the breach to bring us back to normalcy with excellent aplomb. He reached for the match in my hand, shoved one of his special cigars in his mouth, and lighted it with fingers as nerveless as steel.

It had been an excellent demonstration of the Leader calming his men by a demonstration of his own coolness. Jacques and I stared in open admiration at the casual aplomb with which Klobar had carried off that reassuring gesture.

He smiled at us, calmly blowing out the match.

"We should relax a moment, eh, gentlemen. Good tobacco can quiet the nerves. Panic is for the stupid. It is not for us, is it, gentlemen?"

I, myself, was wonderfully braced by that simple act. Jacques, as I watched him leave, was no longer harried, distraught. Klobar's confidence, coolness, had been contagious. His manager was carrying that calm determination back to other underlings. Klobar had braced his entire organization by a simple demonstration of hands that would not tremble.

It was not at all strange that neither Jacques, I, nor Klobar himself gave any thought to a rather startling aspect of the demonstration of iron nerves. We were all too preoccupied with other matters to realize, then, that Klobar had broken a ritual of many years in that demonstration. He had lighted his cigar with a match that had been already used by two others. He had made himself third on a match.

I KNOW Klobar wasn't thinking of that aspect when he took the match from my trembling hand. He was thinking only of calming two of his key underlings, of seizing an opportunity to show us that he was unafraid. The fact that he was making himself third on a match, I am sure, never entered his mind.

I remember the rest of that chaotic night. Lars Klobar fought like a madman against the tide which threatened to sweep away his fortunes. And

fought successfully, ruthlessly, brilliantly, marshalling his forces like the genius of financial generals that he was.

I left him in his office at four that morning. He told me to get a few hours sleep, that he would nap at his desk. He said that the next day should mark the turning point.

"We'll be out of danger then, Viborg," he smiled. "We've almost got them beaten. We almost have the public imagination tamed and in harness once again. That's all we need."

That, as I said, was at four o'clock in the morning. At eight o'clock, just four hours later, a cleaning woman found Lars Klobar, the Match King, slumped over his desk, dead.

There was a gun in his hand, and a bullet from it had gone through that brilliant brain. Lars Klobar, the Match King, was dead . . .

HERE Viborg paused, looked around the barracks. The silence was deafening. We had all been hanging on every word he spoke. I broke the silence.

"Good Lord, Vi," I said, "I recall it all now, the news accounts that flashed across the world. The Match King had committed suicide, his financial house toppled inward with a crash that shook the earth. Lord, yes. It was sensational news!"

Viborg nodded. "Yes it was. It was sensational. The Match King fell, and with him a great part of the continental banking world. But none of the news accounts mentioned the three on a match business. Only two people, Jacques and I, knew that Klobar had died less than twenty-four hours after being the third man on a match—just as the superstition he himself had started indicated he would. I don't really think that Jacques noticed that third on the match angle. I think I'm actually the only one who realized it."

"But now wait a minute, Vi," I protested. "I see what you mean. Three on a match, the third dies before the day ends. But it isn't very cricket to call a self-inflicted death proof of the superstition. Suicide isn't included in the meaning that one will die if he's third on a match."

Viborg smiled. "No, it isn't part of the concept of the superstition, I'll grant you that. If Klobar had committed suicide I'd have no basis for proof of the superstition that destroyed him."

"But that's what he did," I protested. "He killed himself, it was in the papers, you yourself just said so!"

"I said he was found dead," Viborg corrected me. "They presumed it was suicide. But remember this. Suicide was not Klobar's way out. He was no coward. Besides, he was confident that he had saved his empire when I left him that morning. Why, four hours later, would he kill himself?"

"I don't know, but . . ." I began.

Viborg cut me off, gently. "Besides, I was one of the few people who knew that Klobar had one aversion in his life, and that abhorrence was toward guns of any kind. He loathed them, he feared them. He wouldn't have them around, he couldn't bring himself to touch one. Could he possibly have selected a gun to kill himself with, then?"

I whistled. "He was murdered?"

Viborg shrugged. "Officially it was suicide. It has always been my opinion, however, that someone killed him. He had many enemies. And during that crisis his enemies were twice as many."

I was silent a minute.

"I have to admit that your conception of how he died fits in perfectly to the rules of the three on a match super-

(Concluded on page 207)

I'LL SEE

By Cpl. DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT FUQUA

IT WAS odd that she should have been playing their record when the telephone rang. She had been sitting there in the living room with the record on the phonograph machine. She had been smoking a cigarette and reading his latest letter for the dozenth time —and, of course, playing their tune.

The tune wasn't old, not really old, that is—it seemed only yesterday when they'd first danced to it and he'd held her close and sang the words softly into her ear.

"I'll see you again, whenever spring breaks through again."

That hadn't been so long ago. In days and eras and events, perhaps it had been. But not in her heart. It seemed scarcely yesterday. And they'd never lost the tune. Even later, when they were married, it was the one they requested whenever they danced to an orchestra together. He'd always played the piano well, and he'd saved that tune always for something that was special and just their own.

He had played it that afternoon, the afternoon he left. It was his last leave home before going over, and they both were aware of the aching days that were to form a gulf between them. A gulf they'd not be able to bridge again until the flames of war had died.

"Time may lie heavy between . . ."

There had been a huskiness in his voice that afternoon. And when she had smiled, sitting there beside him at the piano, there had been tears in her eyes.

She had always played it afterward, on the phonograph until the record was worn and scratched and she'd had to get a new one, when going through the ritual of reading his weekly letters. A cigarette, solitude, his letter and their tune.

And on this particular evening she had felt so very close to him that the words of his letter came to her ears rather than her eyes, and in the music

YOU AGAIN

He came back from the hell of flak over Germany because he had promised to see her in the springtime

"Darling!" he said. Then he kissed her

from the phonograph there was the completion of his nearness.

That was when the telephone rang.

She hesitated a moment, before putting the letter down and going to answer the phone's insistent clamor. She didn't turn off the machine that was playing their song. She put down the letter, crushed out her cigarette, and stepped over to answer the phone.

"Darling!"

She knew his voice with that first word, and she closed her eyes, while her heart hammered in her breast and her excitement left her breathless. It was impossible. It couldn't be he. She had dreamed too long and too futilely of this moment for it ever to come true.

"Where are you?" she had begged, when she at last found words.

His answer was almost lost to her; she was hypnotized by the sound of his voice and almost completely unaware of the words he was saying.

"Depot . . . here . . . you take a cab . . . only a few minutes . . . passing through . . . haven't long . . ."

She stood there moments after she had placed the telephone back in the cradle. Stood there holding her hand to her heart to still the wild excitement of this moment.

He was here! In this very city!

Going where, she knew not. How it was that he had returned from England, she cared not. The one, important, tinglingly estatic thing was that he was here.

She tried to compose herself in the taxi. She tried to tell herself that she had to be calm. She had to be smiling when she went to his arms. She tried to think of the thousand and one things she wanted to tell him, and tried to decide which of these would be the most

important. He had said it would only be for a few minutes. There wouldn't be time to tell him all that was in her heart.

She didn't remember if she had paid the cabbie or not, but she supposed that she had, for he hadn't called after her as she'd rushed into the depot.

There seemed to be thousands in the depot, and all seemed to be uniformed. She had a moment of black panic at the sight of all the uniforms. Supposing she were unable to find him in this crowd? What if he were unable to find her?

And then she saw him.

HE WAS moving through the crowd, swiftly, smilingly, his arms outstretched, and she ran to them.

Her face was against the tunic of his uniform, and the silver of his wings was cool against her cheek. His strong arms were around her and, though she had made herself promise that she wouldn't, she was crying.

"Darling," she said, "darling, darling, darling."

She looked up at him and smiled.

"That's better," he told her. He reached into his tunic pocket, found a handkerchief. "Here."

She touched her damp eyes with it, and then his arms were once again around her and his lips were close to her ear.

"Time may lie heavy between," he said.

And she knew he remembered. He hadn't forgotten their song. She knew the answer he wanted.

"And what has been, is past forgetting," she told him.

There were moments again in his embrace. Moments more precious than any eternity. In that huge, crowded, teeming room there was no one but the two of them, no world save their own.

At last he said, "It's goodbye now, darling."

Fright came into her eyes, and her hand tightened convulsively over the handkerchief she still held.

"Where this time, darling?"

He shook his head.

"I can't tell you."

"But for how long, this time?"

Again he shook his head.

"You'll know, very shortly," he promised. "That's all I can tell you."

"Darling!" The word came from her lips as a sob.

He put his arms swiftly around her, kissed her once, lingeringly, and then he was moving off, moving away from her into the crowd, his uniform joining the others, his clean white smile flashing against the bronze of his face, his hand waving his farewell.

She followed him with her eyes, and her heart was in them. She smiled, and hoped it was a brave smile and the smile he wanted to see. And then his uniform had completed the camouflage with the thousand others and he was lost from sight.

She turned slowly, and started out of the depot . . .

SHE heard the tune as she climbed the flight of stairs to her apartment. And then she recalled that she hadn't shut off the machine in the excitement of her departure a scant hour before. It was one of those automatic phonographs, and it played a record again and again if it were the last of a stack.

"I'll see you again, whenever spring breaks through again . . ."

The words ached in her heart as she fumbled in her purse for her key. She didn't hear the door opening across the hall. And it wasn't until the white-haired old lady who occupied that apartment spoke, that she became aware of her presence. *(Concluded on page 206)*

AT POKER
AT ROULETTE
AT THE HORSE RACES
WITH GALLOPING DOMINOES ?

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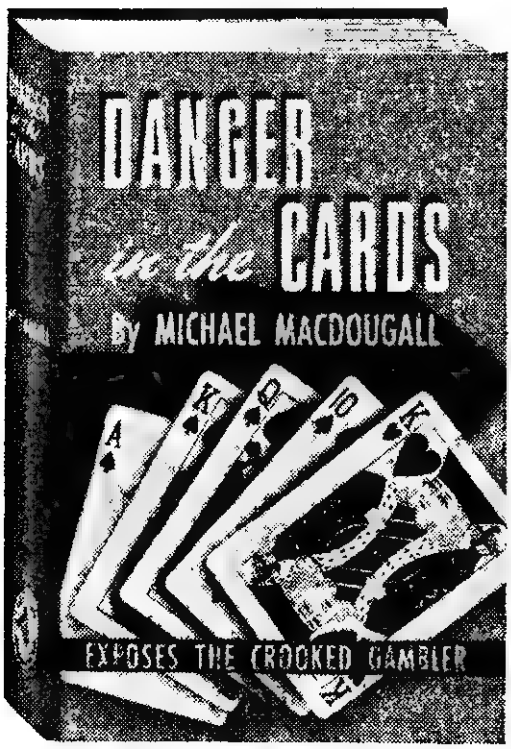
Mickey MacDougall, international gambling detective, exposes in this fantastic story of his adventures, the crooked methods used by sharpers at cards, dice, roulette and other sucker "come-ons." He has rolled up the sleeves of the most expert "gamblers" and bared many a hidden ace. He has uncovered loaded dice and magnetized spinners in the most surprising establishments.



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Scientific

PUEBLO BONITO, N. Mex.

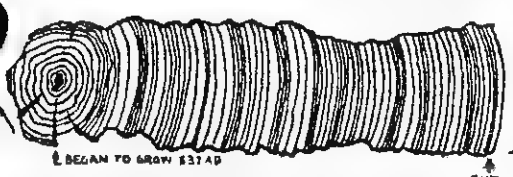
MACHU PICCHU, Peru

SAN ILDEFONSO PUEBLO

THE GREAT RUIN OF PUEBLO BONITO WAS OCCUPIED IN 1067 AND WAS UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN 919 A.D. THERE IS AN AMAZING SIMILARITY BETWEEN THIS GROUP OF RUINS AND THE MACHU PICCHU (INCA OR QUICHA) PUEBLO RUINS FOUND IN PERU

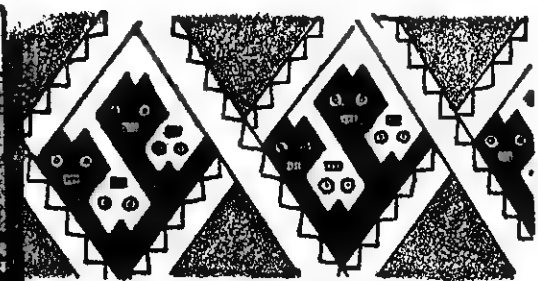
QUICHUA

HOPI GIRL



VERY OLD TREES GROWING OVER THE MOUNDS PROVE THEIR AGE

JIVARO



THE CAT TOTEM IS PREDOMINANT IN THE WEAVING OF PERUVIANS: OF CAT DESIGNS AND CAT FACES

WERE THE HOPI INDIANS MEMBERS OF THE SNAKE CLAN? LIKE THE MUSKHOGEANS THEY WERE IMMUNE TO THE BITE OF POISONOUS REPTILE LIFE

Mysteries

ANCIENT AMERICAN NATIONS

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

WHEN studying the original inhabitants of the Americas, two facts become more and more apparent, as one's knowledge increases. The evident antiquity of the nations with which we are dealing, or rather let us say, the antiquity of the culture which reaches behind those nations into the remote past is the primary fact, but following upon it closely is the strange inter-relationship of tribe to tribe. When dealing with the nations of the Red Man there are no borders of river or mountain, and the likenesses extend, with but slight variations from Canada through Mexico and Nicaragua to the Argentine. Yet the maddening part of the entire picture is the difference in physical type in isolated members of the same language group, when it would seem that language is the key to the mystery; or the difference in language when cultural elements seem to be the key. In other words, the Americas seem to have been a gigantic stew of divergent elements in the process of the second stir, when the invading white man disturbed the pattern.

In the opinion of the present writer, the Uto-Aztecan block of languages which is strung across the center, and which seems to hold within itself two cultures and two physical types, one apparently eastern and one possibly western, may be the main key to this jig-saw puzzle. Certainly this block of tongues holds the oldest cities of North America within its fold, and with extended study to the Indian tongues of South America may show a connection through the Quichua (Inca) tongue with the Maya-Quiche of North America, even as the Nicarao (of Nicaragua) is but an extension of the later wave of Aztec peoples into the south. The extent of this block can be grasped when we realize that it runs through North America from the Bannocks in Idaho the Comanches, Shoshones, Hopis, Pimas, Papagoes and others in the United States, through the Mexican tribes of the Tepecanoes, Opatas, Tarahumaras, Huichols, Mayas and others into the Canal Zone.

As for the time element, which is so necessary to get a true picture of any people, we are fortunately beginning to get our feet upon the ground scientifically, through the research of Dr. A. E. Douglass upon the cross-sections of old trees. Matching the rings in older and ever older pueblos, Dr. Douglass has been able to formulate a calendar which reaches back into the eighth century A.D. Thus he can inform you with absolute scientific certainty that the great ruin of Pueblo Bonito was occupied in 1067, and was under construction in 919 A.D., or before the Saxons of England had heard of William the Conqueror.

Dr. Douglass has even perfected his chronology to the point of being able to take out a small core from the beam in question without removing it. Thus he was able to learn that the still inhabited Hopi town of Walpi was being lived in at the time when Columbus arrived, much in the same fashion as it is today, and was undoubtedly then the site of the famous Snake Dance which today makes it one of the topmost tourist attractions of the twentieth century.

Of course, it is unnecessary to say that this opens up unlimited vistas to the earnest student of the past. Within a few more decades of such research, we should not only have a rather comprehensive idea of the movements of present tribes, but also a weather calendar, which should give wet and dry cycles, for these are, in the last analysis, the reason that people migrate, and cause the long line of reverberations of tribe shocking against tribe.

However, lacking the exact knowledge as yet, of the movements of the Uto-Aztecan members, which we hope, another generation will have, nevertheless, I would like to dare a few predictions. The Hopi who was dancing his Snake Dance upon the square of picturesque old Walpi when Columbus sighted a "new continent," undoubtedly came from the south. Not only are his own traditions to the effect that an invading people drove him from his cities, and to escape them he fled to the northern deserts, but even the layman, watching the single lovely maiden leading the long line of Hopi priests into the rain-well upon the painted wasteland, will recognize the little "Bride of Zamma" who was thrown into the Sacred Well of Chichen-Itza in Yucatan some two thousand years ago.

Of course, there are cultural elements in the Pueblos more ancient than this, such as, for example, the fox-tail hanging down from the belt. An Egyptologist will recognize in this an essential part of the costume pictured on the first vase we have which depicts for us a hunting scene of predynastic Egypt. It is almost uncanny that this

very earliest bit of authentic costuming which we possess is actually worn in the exact detail and manner in which it was worn some twenty milleniums ago in Egypt.

But to return to our Hopi, we note other details of that famous dance given during the hot month of August, and, so they say, ALWAYS followed by rain which often seems to come from nowhere. The members of the Snake Clan hold the reptiles in their mouth in just exactly the manner in which a similar dancer is depicted on a Mayan temple painting. Nor can we again fail to recognize the white bands painted out from the nose, as a relic of the ancient nose-tube, another one of the various nose guards adopted by worshippers of The Veiled One.

A member of The Snake Clan, a friend of the present writer for many years, has assured him that the Clan is not as much a hereditary ritual as it is a secret society. Thus it is possible that the Clan migrated north, and long ago amalgamated with the Antelope Clan, who may have been a "foreign" people—an Indian tribe speaking another language. He also seemed to hint that they were unafraid of snakes, feeling themselves (because of certain unnamed medical processes) quite immune from ill effects should one of the reptiles strike. This again recalls the vaunted immunity of the early Muskhogeans. Were they another fraction of the shattered and migrating Snake Clan?

ANOTHER curious element of Pueblo Culture is that they have two rulers, two sets of people, and two sets of gods. Each Pueblo is divided up into "Winter" and "Summer" people. Even their view-points upon life differ. The "Summer" people are always the most conservative—the most devoted to the past. They dance unmasked, and their rituals are considered the oldest. They hold those rituals in the summer when the gods of the "Winter" people have gone away.

Upon the other hand, the "Winter" gods are elegantly masked and costumed. They come in from the desert in a long file and while they remain, they are elaborately entertained. They visit all the houses, sometimes begging food and sometimes chasing the children or enquiring of the mothers if the little ones have been good during their absence. And then, after they have stayed their set time, they again depart in a long line across the desert. The names of these "Winter" gods are strangely similar from tribe to tribe. "K't Sana," "Katchina" or in the Sierra of Mexico, the "Matchines," they are all elegantly costumed and their dances are very intricate. In the Sierra of Mexico, as well as among the Yaqui Indians who fled across the border during their clashes with the Mexican Government and are now living in Arizona, these dancers are as elaborately costumed as their poverty will allow. It is a curious fact that the Katchinas have become an integral part of the Christian ritual with the christianized Tarahumaras, Yaquis and other christianized tribes of Mexico.

Is it any significance that most of these "Winter" gods come into the Pueblos and return again from the direction of the *west?* Could it be possible that K'tchina means just what it very literally says—K't being "people" and China being the name of a modern land with a long history? Do these elaborately masked and costumed figures have any relationship to the oddly-stiff and beautifully costumed figures which still take part in Chinese drama? If this is true, then it suggests commercial intercourse. Perhaps it has a vague connection to the Chinese dog in cast bronze found under one of the huge fallen Maya steles, or the Mexican legend of the Chinese fleet which was shipwrecked and the exquisitely lovely Mongol princess who, with her dowry and handmaidens, was being taken to a distant kingdom to be married when the god of the thunderstorms took a hand in the planning of her future life. The Mexicans will tell you that the style of the embroidered blouse and full skirt which is worn so widely in Mexico today was due to this ancient glamorous creature. If so, she was shipwrecked many centuries past, since the style is depicted on Mayan paintings, even as tamalas and tortillas are depicted.

On the whole, the culture of the Pueblos of the Southwest is conceded to be very old indeed. It shows very little similarity to Aztec. In fact it is far more like the culture of Ancient Peru than it is like the cultures surrounding it, though some scientists are of the opinion that there is too much similarity to Mound-Builder Culture to be ignored.

If the Mound-Builders were in their prime during the start of the Christian era, as some authorities believe, the Pueblos may be refugee groups who fled west into the inhospitable deserts to escape the invaders. This theory is somewhat strengthened by the fact that the Yumans inhabiting Arizona, are today, or let us say, were, not long before they were placed upon reservations, building effigy mounds. These mounds were not discovered until the time of the transcontinental air service, when airplanes, flying above the desert, realized that certain natural-looking hills in the Yuma country were in reality, gigantic animal-shapes, such as the Serpent, etc.

Furthermore, because the tribes local to the present great Mound-Builder Sites, consider those places sacred (which they would hardly do if built by an enemy people), and also because ritualistic mounds are always featured in their ceremonies, most scientists are inclined to view them as possible descendents. However, it is more likely that they were not in the full, direct line of descent, but only amalgamated with the invading peoples. Nevertheless, in the question,

(Continued on page 209)

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DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

FICTION IN DISCUSSIONS!

Sirs:

In my humble opinion the best feature in your mag is "Discussions." Honestly, I find more fiction there than I do in the rest of the magazine.

As to your choice of stories—excellent! Although for my part I prefer stories of time travel and stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Why not bring back his Pellucidar series? Even though I've read them all, I could re-read them with great pleasure. Let's have less detective and western stories and stick to regular science fiction with an occasional fantasy thrown in, please.

Cpl. M. I. Goodwin, USA
Camp Hulen, Texas.

If you mean our letters are fiction, you are wrong. We get hundreds of letters each month, and all those we publish are unchanged, except for deletions for editorial reasons. And perhaps you'll note that in the case of letters from soldiers we delete the details of their units, so that locations of specified divisions, etc., are not revealed to the enemy. Burroughs is a war correspondent, and not writing fiction at present and we find our readers prefer new stories to reprints.—ED

SOME SUGGESTIONS

Sirs:

I don't know if it means anything to you or not, but it should because many of your sales are to us in the armed services.

First, keep away from this war. It's taboo. That's our life now. We have seen and been through most all one can say concerning this war. A mag or book is something to sit back and relax and enjoy. Why bring us back to the conflict we're in?

I have seen *Amazing Stories* bought at all the way from $3 to $5 a copy and fought over like dogs. You see, mags are so few and far between. Not enough in the PXs nor easy to get hold of.

We like a novel and a couple shorts that are fairly long rather than a novel and four shorts. Take "Warrior Of The Dawn," "The Eagle Man," "Mystery Of The Lost Race"; they're tops.

I have read *Amazing Stories* for years, but you keep losing out with stories like "Blitz Against Japan!" You give us those wars between the planets—we will take care of the Japs and Germans for you.

Sgt. Jack Tomberger, USA,
Atlantic Beach, Fla.

Isn't it odd that when we asked our soldier authors to write for this issue, many of them selected the war as their background? However, we hope you'll find enough interplanetary stuff, too, in this and coming issues. Your comment on the dogfights and the prices paid for copies of our

magazines is interesting, and flattering, but just the same we feel pretty badly about such a situation existing. We have tried to remedy it by sending the greatest number of copies to PXs all over the country. Maybe soon, the government will allot us more paper for your favorite magazines! As for novels, we have a lot of very fine ones on hand, and you'll get just what you want!—ED.

AN AIR CADET WRITES

Sirs:

After waiting weeks for the next issue of your magazine, and hastily devouring it, I end up with a rather let-down feeling. There were only three stories in the whole mag worth commenting on. 1. "The Free-lance Of Space" by Edmond Hamilton was okay. Keep up the fine work, Hamilton! 2. "The Constant Drip" by Berkeley Livingston was as humorous as they come here of late. I must say I enjoy shorts—not the striped ones—more than the majority of your novels and novelets. 3. "Murder In Space" by David V. Reed. One of the most interesting "detective" stories I've had occasion to read in science fiction.

I wish to add my vote for more and more of your humorous shorts.

I am constantly amazed at some of the more youthful fans. Some of the letters they write would do wonders in a high school essay class—if the teachers would accept science-fiction for essay work. What I mean is that these modern 13-year-olds are writing such brilliant letters, contesting some of the more scientific aspects of the stories. My congratulations to them.

How about some more of Eando Binder's work? I still remember his stories on Adam Link, the iron man. More Burroughs, Bond, and Wilcox and I'll be happy.

I've gotten quite a kick also out of the storm that Jos. C. Serene loosed on his head. "Be there a man with soul so dead, who never to himself has said—Damn!"

I still think Discussions is the best part of the magazine—I know, *you* agree with me!

A/C Walter E. Brown,
Craig Field,
Selma, Alabama.

Well, the three stories you list as good represent 70% of the contents, so we did very well with you! Yes, the youngsters who read us are a pretty smart bunch! Binder is still "tied" to comic book writing, and we just can't drag him away. But then, we introduced Buck Rogers to the public, so it's on our own heads! Bond is a script writer now for radio, and way way up there!—ED.

COMMENT COMPLETE!

Sirs:

Having just passed my 24th birthday and also just finished reading and thoroughly enjoying the Fall 1943 A. S. Quarterly (Incidentally I'll be waiting for the next issue!) I thought it was about time I should send in my brickbats and bouquets! O. K.?

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I began reading S.F. along about 1932 when I got hold of a big stack of *Amazing Stories* of the '27 and '28 period, as close as I remember. I really enjoyed 'em a lot, reading them all over twice and some three times! Since then I read all the S.F. I can get in my hands!

I would like to see more good stories of the "Skylark" and "John Carter" type. Time travel is tops, too!

"Juggernaut Jones" makes a good short in any issue! Also a good short-short of about 2 or 3 pages in each issue would be okay.

By the way! In the contents list inside the front cover of the Fall '43 Quarterly Reissue—what happened to the stories listed in the last third section? You list "That Worlds May Live" to "Periscope Prey" and then give us the Dec. reprint "Warrior of the Dawn," etc. How about that?

In authors I like more of Burroughs, Costello, Weinbaum, Yerxa, Swain ("The Persian Carpet" —Good) Jarvis ("The Metal Monster" also O.K.!) Repp, O'Brien (Good story in "Bring Back My Body!"), Bond, Wilcox and Binder. All are good!

Magarian, Hadley, Fuqua, Hadden, Paul, Finlay, for illustrations and give Jackson, Brady, and Smith a bit more experience and a few pointers before they try again!

Front covers? How about a few good ones showing "people" of other systems and future "gadgets" and "inventions"! Also how about giving us a reprint of the contest that was on years ago on the "scientifiction" emblem once published as a cover attraction? O. K.?

Keep up the S.F. cartoons—more! "Fillers" are O. K.! Good going! A few jokes, too, maybe?

My last comment—why not run some kind of contest for S. F. fans occasionally? It keeps up interest!

Hope this (my first) letter to A. S. is successful in the eyes of the fans! Be seeing ya again, maybe!

Pvt. Matt Hall, U.S.A.
Camp Pickett, Va.

Since we are quarterly now, our "quarterlies" are no longer published. As for the mixup in magazines in that particular quarterly, you are only adding to the coals we ourselves have heaped on the binders' heads! It's things like that make an editor blow his top. Contests will have to wait till after the war—when you soldiers can get in on 'em again!—Ed.

YEP, WE SCOOPED 'EM!

Sirs:

It was indeed a most pleasant surprise to find this month's cover a rocket picture! And as if that isn't enough, you go and announce the next issue as an all-service one. Will wonders never cease? In speaking of the cover, I might say you

have combined a masterpiece of coloring and astronomical accuracy I have rarely seen depicted.

Here is my rating of the stories. 1. "Murder In Space" by David V. Reed. This is by far one of the finest novels I have read in some time. Please let us have more stories by this author. 2. "I Rocket" by Ray Bradbury. This unique story by now well known short story writer brings out all the cleverness and comical ability that goes to make it tops. Please, let's have more shorts in the future by this likeable author. 3. "The Free-Lance Of Space" by Edmond Hamilton. Mere mention of this author's name assures good reading enjoyment no matter in what publication you may find his story. 4. "The Headless Horror" by Helmar Lewis. Darn good writing and interesting throughout. 5. "Midas Morgan's Golden Touch" by Emil Petaja. Interesting angle on an old tale. 6. "The Constant Drip" by Berkeley Livingston. Ah for the secret of this story. Really entertaining and desirable subject indeed.

Hats off to a really swell issue. Yes, the May issue was really better than I've seen *Amazing Stories* in a long time. In your Service issue you will have scooped fandom, science fiction, and fantasy in one mighty bunch. That lineup of contributors looks like the Who's Who of Pro Stfiction and Fantasy. I shall be ready to buy a good supply of that issue, you can be sure. Now let 'em say *Amazing* is poor reading! That issue will convert 'em quick enough. I also give delayed congrats to that special Signal Corps issue of *Radio News, Amazing's* amazing sister.

Pfc. John M. Cunningham, AAF,
Chico Army Air Field,
Chico, California.

Your enthusiasm is catching, and welcome! And we think you called your shot about this service issue! It's really fine, we think. Our writers came through wonderfully. And we started something—because the boys refuse to stop! They write every spare minute. We have gotten five *stories from O'Brien alone! Williams is working on several. McGivern submitted one, Hamling three, Steele two, Cabot two. Which means our supply of our fighting author's stories is* not *exhausted. All because we dreamed up a "soldier" issue!*—Ed.

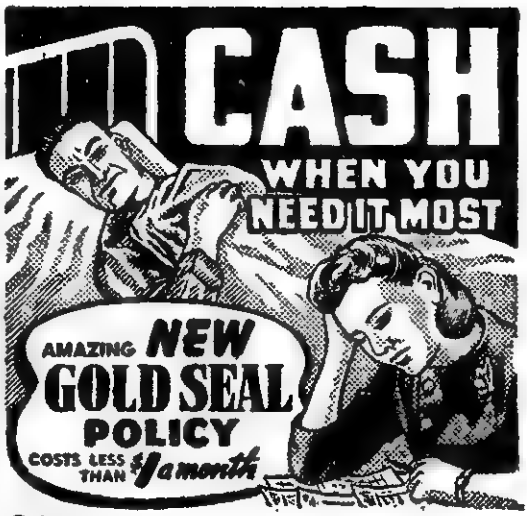
SOMETHING TO PUSH AGAINST

Sirs:

How can there be space travel if there is no form of air or gravitational field in space, as all rocket ships would be some form of rocket blast propulsion which would need something to push against, but as there is nothing to push against it could not force its way through the void.

Jack D. Ahsbahs,
Seaman, C. P. O.
U. S. Maritime Service,
Lynwood, California.

Rockets work by RECOIL, and do not push against anything. They work BEST in a vacuum! —Ed.



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READERS' PRIZE CORNER

EFFECTIVE with this issue, this department will be discontinued. AMAZING STORIES, as its part in the war effort, has voluntarily reduced its number of issues to a quarterly basis to help alleviate a serious paper shortage which is dangerous to the war manufacturing effort. Thus many of our readers are unable to participate through inability to secure copies of the magazine.

Our prize winning entry for the May issue was submitted by:

Pfc. John Haliburton,
Hq. Det. 31st Tng. Wg.,
Sheppard Field, Texas.

Our check for $10.00 has gone to him with our congratulations on a nicely expressed opinion of our magazine.

I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN

(Concluded from page 196)

"I'm so glad you're back," the old lady said somewhat breathlessly. "I heard your phonograph playing, but you didn't answer when the boy rang, nor when I rang. He left this for you."

The old lady handed her the telegram.

She thanked her automatically, and opened the door of her apartment. The music was louder now. The old lady, curious as only very old ladies can be, lingered hopefully, her eyes wistfully on the telegram.

"Aren't you going to read it?" she asked.

"In a moment," she said.

The old lady sighed and went back to her own apartment.

It wasn't until she had closed the door behind her that she glanced at the telegram in her hand. And then she walked into the living room, where the phonograph was still playing, tearing open the telegram abstractedly.

"Time may lie heavy between . . ."

The song was a blur between her eyes and the words of the telegram.

"But what has been . . ."

She was reading the telegram for the second time, still without conscious comprehension of what it meant.

"Is past forgetting . . ."

And then the import of the message came to her, each word striking with dreadful, anvil clarity on her brain.

"Regret to inform you . . . your husband . . . Sgt. . . . killed in action . . . bomber sweep over Germany . . ."

She didn't realize that she had dropped her purse, and that she now held only the telegram and the handkerchief that he had given her. She stared first at the telegram, then at the handkerchief, and a fist closed around her heart.

"Regret . . . husband . . . killed . . . bomber . . . Germany. . . ."

The words hadn't changed, though in those brief seconds she had begged God that they would. And then she became conscious of the handkerchief.

And as she opened it, to see his initials in the corner, she saw, for the first time, the small crimson stain on the other corner of it . . .

MATCHES AND KINGS

(Concluded from page 193)

stition, Vi," I said. "He was the third, and he died before another day had passed."

"Exactly," said Viborg. "Will you have a smoke? I just found these in my jacket pocket."

He passed a pack of Camels around; the boys all dug in. I struck a match, lighted Vi's, lighted Callahan's, and started to light Nolan's.

"Uh-uh," he said. "Not me. Blow it out."

We used three matches to light six cigarettes. But I didn't mind wasting them, scarce as they seemed to be. Hell, you won't catch me being third on a match. Not any more you won't!

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STORIES of the STARS

By Sgt. MORRIS J. STEELE

Betelgeuse, In Orion

Science believes this giant sun may have a family of planets of its own; and artist Paul has imagined a scene on one of them

BETELGEUSE is one of the twenty first magnitude stars. Its magnitude is 0.9; its right ascension is 5.9; its declination + 7.4; it is on meridian at 8 PM on Feb. 15; its radial velocity is + 21.0; its distance is almost 250 light years; its luminosity is 1,000 times that of the sun; its volume is 27,000,000 times greater than that of the sun; it is a Class M star, which means its temperature is of the order of 3,000°; its color is red owing to strong absorption of the blue end of its spectrum; its angular diameter is 0" .047, and its linear diameter is 260,000,000 miles which would fill almost the orbit of Mars; its mass is about four times that of our sun; its density is 1/10,000 of that of our atmosphere at sea level; its spectrum contains strong bands of titanium oxide; it is a star in the constellation Orion, who was a giant and mighty hunter, who with a club in one hand and a lion's skin in the other, faces Taurus the Bull.

Less technically, Betelgeuse is a giant sun about which we know a great deal, and it is entirely possible that it should have a family of planets just as does our sun, and is perfectly capable of sustaining life upon them.

Artist Frank R. Paul, who is now working in some capacity for the Navy in Florida, has envisaged such a planet in his excellent painting on this issue's back cover. He has brought out several subtle points which can be analyzed.

First, he has pictured a planet inhabited by what we may assume to be quite advanced beings insofar as mechanical science is considered. In so doing he has expressed the opinion that this planet is an exceedingly old one. We arrive at this deduction from scanning the facts we have outlined at the opening of this article—for it would take many ages for a giant planet to cool sufficiently to allow life forms, due to its proximity to a sun so huge and so hot. Too, the civilization of the life forms would develop slowly due to the slow rate of cooling. Thus we may easily say that the civilization pictured here is millions of years old. One thing we notice from Paul's creations is that in spite of their long period of existence, they have not discovered the principle of the wheel, as it is applied to forward motion, but have discovered the principle as applied to moving joints and parts. This is a commentary on civilized development all over the universe which would serve to show the great variety of differences in mechanical advancement that might be encountered simply because all ramifications of a simple idea might not be hit upon.

Although Betelgeuse, as a whole, is very much less dense than our atmosphere, Paul's planet is pictured having an atmosphere very much like our own. This would indicate the planet is not much larger than our own, and probably has the same gravitational pull. On this basis, we assume that the people of this planet are of human stature.

We know that the planet (at least the area shown) is semi-tropical, from the vegetation, and from the fact that the inhabitants go about unclothed.

Water, clouds, rainfall seem about as normal as Earth, and the terrain is both mountainous and flat, with here and there evidences of volcanic activity seen in the presence of craters much like those seen on our moon.

However, here the resemblance to Earth stops. The people of this planet have never lived together in the Earth conception of a city. They have established no dwelling places whatever. Instead, they live constantly in the two-legged vehicles pictured, migrating from place to place in bands much as does a primitive tribe, and establishing a "camp" when wanted, simply by lowering the machines down to the ground on squatted legs. These are their "cities."

Apparently they are the only race on this planet, since they are unarmed, and their walking homes do not appear to be armed. They proceed without scouts, seem to fear no danger; thus it is logical to assume that none exists. Instantly we see why—

On this planet, civilized life has advanced at such a slow rate, due to the conditions of cooling, that struggle never became a part of its progress. It is a lazy world where no being struggles against another. Here we would find a philosophy impossible for us to understand. It may be that the inhabitant of this world grows to maturity solely to become one of the wandering tribe, largely irresponsible, oblivious of the portent of passing time, and unambitious, driven only through the necessity of occasionally replacing his simple machines to continue his nomad existence.

He has no culture in our concept of the word. His is a moving civilization which builds no libraries, no permanent works. His planet's slow metabolism is a shackle on his climb up evolution's ladder.

SCIENTIFIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 200)

we must not overlook the fact that the Natchez and other Muskhogean tribes, when discovered by the whites, were building their carved and painted wooden temples upon mounds, while the Cherokee have ritualistic mounds in their ceremonies.

ANOTHER strange totemistic similarity stretching across the Americas is the extent of the Tiger Tribes. The effigies which they make in stone often resemble lions more closely than they do tigers, but because lions are not native to the Americas, the scientsts insist upon calling them tigers.

Take, for example, the "Stone Lions" of Cochiti Pueblo. They are revered by all of the Pueblo peoples, but are the especial guardians of the Cochiti. Old ruins of the Cochiti reveal great stone lions carved from the living rock, but long since smashed almost beyond recognition—probably by the surrounding nomadic peoples. Stone lions, or tigers, reappear again among the Toltec ruins, while still further south, we know that the Quiche peoples called themselves the "Tiger Tribes" when they invaded the Mayas and amalgamated with them, giving us the much-used name of Maya-Quiche.

However, the real home of the cat totem seems to be Peru, especially Pre-Incan Peru. The excellent weaving of these peoples which is the finest that the world has ever seen, made much of cat design and cat faces. These are curiously duplicated near Cuicatlan in Oaxaca, Mexico. Scientists uncovering these designs on old pottery were shocked at the likeness between them and those of the Nazca.

Again, the Quichuas, like the Pueblos are double-led, having a Chief of Peace and one of War. With the Quichuas, the High Priest was a brother of the Inca himself. Furthermore, the Quichua cities were often composed of two clans with a street for a dividing line, while the houses which were composed of adobe, were entered from the roof by means of ladders. Terraced houses of adobe were also built in Mexico and often mentioned by the exploring Spanish entering Mexico City for the first time.

Other likenesses are too numerous to mention here, but both the Pueblos and the peoples of Peru, both before and after the Quichuas, were great agriculturists, using similar tools and ceremonies, as well as terraced land and irrigation. The Egyptian hairdress of bangs is prominent in both localities. The Incan crown was a set of false red bangs. On the other hand, the picturesque whorl head-dress of the Hopi maiden is to be found among the Ancient Chorotegans of Guatemala who were also famous for their polychrome pottery, and are now only known to archaeologists, having long ago disappeared.

(Concluded on page 210)

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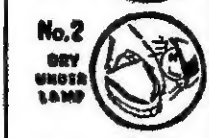

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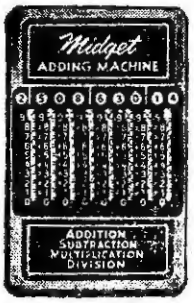

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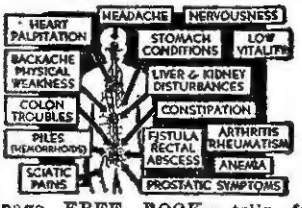

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SCIENTIFIC MYSTERIES

(Concluded from page 209)

How does it happen that these small villages of an extremely ancient culture seem to be marooned on our desert? If we could understand why they have such a likeness of cultural pattern even to the clowns (who, incidentally, are also depicted on Chorotegan pottery), and yet such a great language gap, we would be far along the trail to finding out.

As it is, we can only wonder why the name Quichi, or Chee-chee, is so strongly associated with the tiger tribes even from the Quichuas of Peru to the Co-chi-ti Pueblo. Or ponder the strange reoccurrence of the name Nima, who leads the "Going Out Of The Gods" in the desert, and reappears among the Mayas as Nima-Quiche, the great leader of the "Migrations," who died upon the unending journeys and never lived to see the tribes reach Yucatan.

Who was Nima-Quiche? It is another question whose answer we do not have. There are no comparisons as yet between the Peruvian Quechua and the Desert Pueblo tongues. Who was Nima-Quiche? The answer must await generations of research. Perhaps then, when the history of the Americas is rewritten, our great-grandchildren may find out. And perhaps we shall never know.

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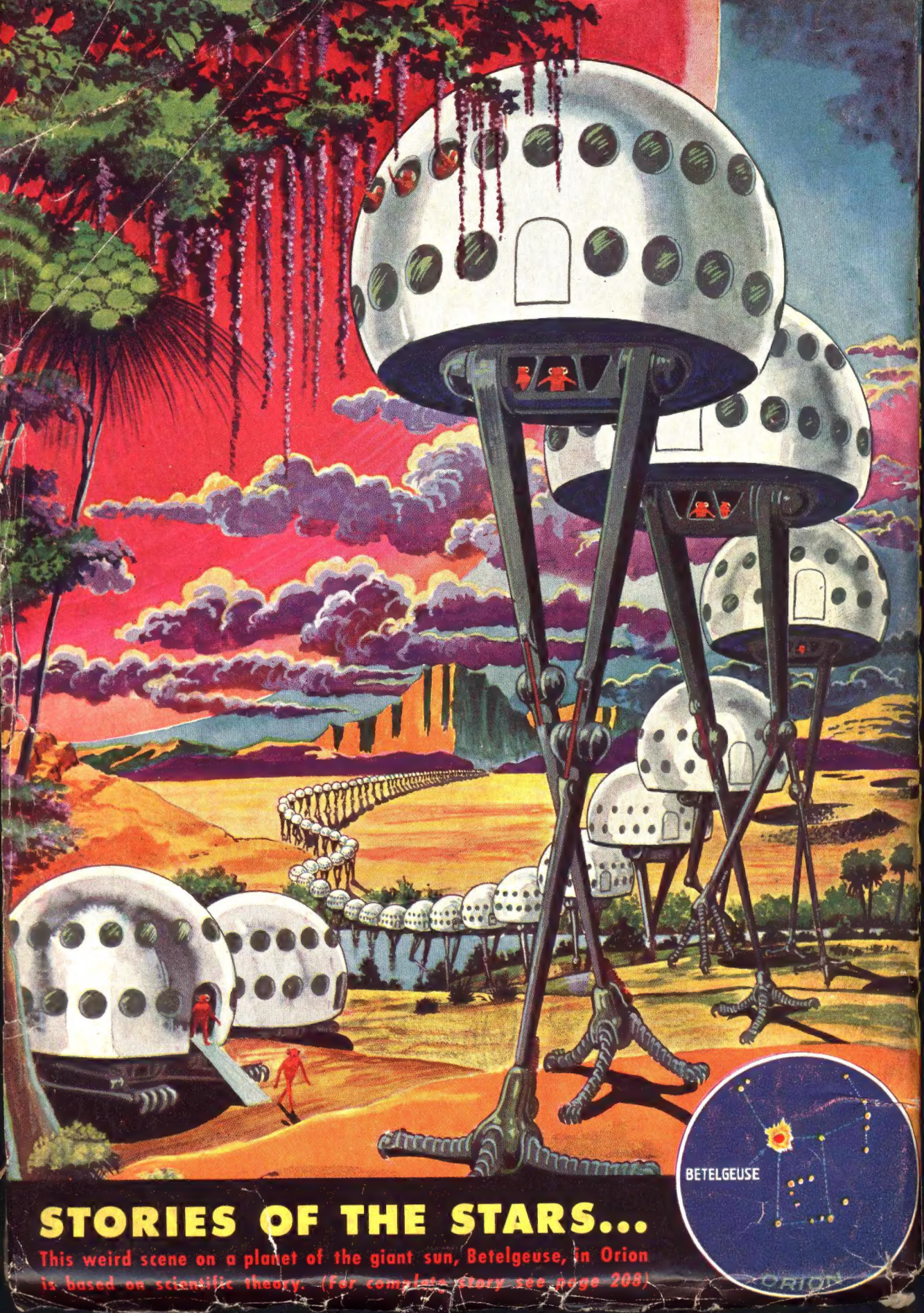

STORIES OF THE STARS...

This weird scene on a planet of the giant sun, Betelgeuse, in Orion is based on scientific theory. (For complete story see page 208)